

ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: DELIBERATELY  
DEVELOPING CRISIS LEADERS AT THE  
CLEFT OF THE ROCK CHURCH

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: DELIBERATELY DEVELOPING CRISIS LEADERS AT THE CLEFT OF THE ROCK CHURCH**

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Research suggested a link between crisis leadership and resilient communities. This study was conducted at Cleft of the Rock Church in San Antonio, Texas. Consistent with other examples, Adaptable Leadership skills enabled the congregation to innovate, build, and soar to serve a community in crisis. Unfortunately, church planting groups, denominations, and the academy all fail to prepare churches and leaders for crisis. If these organizations deliberately developed adaptable leaders, those leaders will be better prepared for crisis management and community building. This project validated the importance of adaptable leadership competencies through foundational research, an instructional workshop, and six assessment methods.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I am thankful for my wife Tracy. Anything good I have accomplished in life is because of her unwavering love and support. She is truly the best part of us. I am also thankful for my daughters, Jasmine and Justis. To be their father is my chief joy.

Likewise, I am thankful to those who supported me on this academic journey. A special thank you to my mentors – Dr. Vance Ross, Dr. Lilian Smith, and Dr. Rudy Rasmus.

Everyone was kind, encouraging, and generous with their time. Finally, I am thankful for Cleft of the Rock Church. This project is about our context, not just mine. I hope the love, perseverance, and faithfulness that is so prevalent in our community shine brightly in these pages. It has been a remarkable journey.

## **DEDICATION**

To the only wise God and loving Savior who through the power of Holy Spirit continues to provide the best for my worst through amazing grace. Also, to those who carry the gospel in their hearts and the mantle of leadership on their shoulders.

## ILLUSTRATIONS

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## **ABBREVIATIONS**

COVID-19	Coronavirus
V.U.C.A	Volatile, Uncertain, Complex, Ambiguous



## INTRODUCTION

Years ago, children participated in a game that measured their flexibility. Though the rules were unclear, the goal of the game was to twist and contort the body without falling. During the game, competitors had to not only reach for colors but also do so while avoiding obstacles. In retrospect, it was a delightful game with a significant message. The game of life, like the children's game, is full of twists and turns. However, flexibility and willingness to adapt prepare participants to triumph during difficult circumstances. This applies to games, life, and leadership.

If you ask someone if they are adaptable, they will without a doubt say yes. After all, who would not want to be known for their adaptability? Or, as an adaptable leader. It sounds regal, rich, renowned, and resourceful to be called adaptable. In leadership, it is admirable, and perhaps, attractive to be considered adaptable. The truth is, that adaptability is not always as pretty and simple as it seems.

Adaptability takes more effort to develop than esthetic appeal. Moreover, the core of adaptation is not fully realized in circumstances that are resource-rich, low-risk, and barrier-free. It is earned through crucibles and crosses, and in the valleys of hopelessness, depression, and depletion. Further, adaptability is the just-in-time solution to seemingly intractable problems. It is the rescue effort that is too dangerous to attempt in normal circumstances but is too important to dismiss out of hand given the high stakes.

Adaptability is the innovation that was once called ignorant. Adaptability is not veiled in

a "coat of many colors"; it is gained in the tattered clothing of the pit, prison, and persecution.<sup>1</sup>

Faith fuels adaptability, which is defined by the writer of Hebrews as "the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen."<sup>2</sup> In Romans, the apostle Paul discusses hope and adaptability. "Who asks for what they see?" he says, perplexed. Later, Paul says that patient perseverance in hope, accompanied by a sense of expectation, will yield great reward.<sup>3</sup> Paul's concept appears to characterize adaptation as taking a calculated risk in the face of uncertainty and without absolute clarity about the outcome. A similar base underpins adaptable leadership. It is a great example of flexible leadership when average, outmatched, and under-resourced leaders embrace risk to traverse volatile, unpredictable, difficult, and ambitious settings.

While the Christian church has faced crises from its inception, the coronavirus had a far-reaching impact on the modern church. The global pandemic upended conventions and transformed contexts and communities in unimaginable ways - the world closed, and the church followed. The light of the church dimmed in some areas and was completely extinguished in others during a moment of profound uncertainty. Fortunately, for some, the pause was not permanent. Ministry was resurrected through innovation. Adaptability made holy community possible. Though some church leaders and their congregations disappeared because of the crisis, others thrived on the wings of flexibility.

The goal of this project is leadership development. To properly navigate a crisis, the church must embrace innovation and adaptability. This necessitates skilled leadership.

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<sup>1</sup> Referencing the Joseph narrative found in *Genesis* 37-47.

<sup>2</sup> *Hebrews* 11:1 (NKJV, unless otherwise noted)

<sup>3</sup> *Romans* 8:24-28

I contend that if denominations, church planting groups, and the academy work to intentionally develop adaptable leaders, they will produce more crisis-ready leaders and resilient communities. Each chapter in this document is a foundational building block for my precis and project.

The first chapter focuses on my story, the leadership team, context, and accomplishments of San Antonio's Cleft of the Rock Church. Throughout the pandemic, the relatively new church retooled its plan to create a sacred community and worship space. Its resilience and resourcefulness provide good outcomes that highlight the importance of connecting during a crisis.

Then, the second chapter looks at Mary of Magdala and her devotion to both the community and Christ, as found in Matthew 28. Mary was an ever-present and seemingly brave leader during the crises of Jesus Christ's crucifixion and burial. Mary became a messenger of the resurrection to the other disciples, and she rallied a divided group to meet Jesus in Galilee. The chapter suggests that leadership is essential during times of crisis.

Next, the third chapter focuses on the Black Plague (Black Death) throughout Europe. Tens of millions of people died because of the Black Death in the fourteenth century. Every aspect of society, including the church, was affected. During the catastrophe, the church discovered a way to provide material and spiritual care in a crisis-saturated environment. It is evident from this chapter that daring, imaginative, and flexible leadership made a difference.

Afterward, the fourth chapter turns to theology. Specifically, the Ecclesiology of Communion or Communion Ecclesiology. The rites, sacraments, and ordinances of the

church serve as reminders of God's power, presence, promises, and provision. One of the fundamental religious rites is communion. It underlines the holy bond between believers as well as the special relationship between man and God. According to Communion Ecclesiology, the physical assembly of believers constitutes a sacrament. As a result, the church is not just a group of people or a geographical location where the sacraments are performed; rather, the church assembly itself is God's grace. As seen during the recent pandemic, sacred communities can help people through difficult times.

The interdisciplinary topic of Adaptable (Adaptive) Leadership is the focus of chapter five. Adaptable leadership, in contrast to other leadership styles, involves shared power. It is a leadership approach that emphasizes followers and encourages people to accept change. During a crisis, this kind of leadership is very crucial. To solve and soar, both the leader and the follower play crucial roles.

Finally, chapter six presents the findings of a qualitative research investigation. A leadership development conference was conducted in May 2023. Registrants from multiple denominations and leadership roles signed up for the conference. Data were gathered via pre-and post-surveys, journaling, interviews, knowledge checks, and assessments. Participants at the conference received training in adaptable leadership. The results were evaluated later. The outcomes demonstrated the value of the instruction and the relative significance of purposeful development of flexible leadership.

Neither the church nor the communities they operate in can avoid crises. They are inevitable. However, the church and the academy can deliberately develop crisis-ready leaders who rise to the occasion and help lead resilient communities, and ultimately soar to success.

## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **MINISTRY FOCUS**

The late Tupac Shakur was an entertainer, actor, and poet. In his poem, “The Rose That Grew Through Concrete,” Shakur succinctly celebrates courage in the face of crisis.

He writes:

We wouldn’t ask why a rose that grew from the concrete had damaged petals, in turn, we would all celebrate its tenacity, we would all love its will to reach the sun, well, we are the roses, this is the concrete, and these are my damaged petals, don’t ask me why, thank God, and ask me how.<sup>1</sup>

The poem’s lyrics are not just a celebration of courage, but they move the reader to find the competencies required to overcome crisis within a given context. In other words, it drives an analysis of the education, exposure, and experiences of the metaphorical rose that produced success under dire circumstances.

The COVID-19 pandemic, and its ripples, significantly impacted the church and its leaders. In response, church leaders scrambled to cope with the pandemic and manage their congregations. Were pastors professionally prepared to lead under pressure? Did they have the requisite skills to provide sound spiritual and organizational leadership? Some did, but I suggest many did not. While most ministers lack formal academic preparation prior to accepting the call to pastor, even seminaries fail to equip pastors with the professional leadership competencies needed to navigate significant crises.

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<sup>1</sup> Genius, “The Rose That Grew from Concrete,” Genius, November 21, 2000, <https://genius.com/2pac-the-rose-that-grew-from-concrete-lyrics>.

Unfortunately, church leaders who are not prepared to lead under pressure can do more harm than good. Contrary to popular beliefs, people do not rise to the occasion, but they fall to the level of their training. Ultimately, the pandemic revealed a need for crisis-prepared pastoral leadership.

What were the competencies leaders needed to not only survive but also thrive during the global pandemic? Identifying and teaching the competencies required for resilient and innovative leadership will help pastors navigate major crises, innovate, and replant to optimize organizational effectiveness. Failure to build these competencies will result in leaders with limited abilities and church organizations with marginal effectiveness in the face of crisis.

This chapter examines how my ministry focus produced success during a crisis in my context. This case study warrants further research into the competencies required for crisis leadership, which form the preliminary basis for this proposed doctoral project. Identifying and training pastors on crisis leadership competencies will produce church leaders who are resilient and prepared to thrive during a crisis.

### **Context**

Cleft of the Rock Church is in a crisis-impacted context. The church leaders are seeking to navigate a global pandemic, minister to the churchless, and build a community for the disconnected. While some of the contextual issues were pre-existent, the pandemic exacerbated the problem. The current condition also revealed a church leadership culture ill-prepared to thrive during a crisis.

## *Coronavirus Disease*

Coronavirus disease, also known as COVID-19, is a global pandemic that claimed the lives of millions and impacted countless others. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it first appeared in Wuhan, China, in late 2019.<sup>2</sup> No one predicted, with specificity, how the virus would change the world from then until now. From Shanghai to San Antonio, everyone experienced the primary and subsequent effects of both the virus and the international response to the crisis. The virus took a physical, emotional, mental, social, and spiritual toll on the world.

The most catastrophic impact was health related. At last writing in March 2023, there were over 759 million cases of COVID-19, resulting in almost seven million deaths globally.<sup>3</sup> There were over 103 million cases and one million deaths in the United States alone. Texas had over eight million cases and ninety thousand deaths.<sup>4</sup> Everyone knows someone who was either infected or impacted by COVID-19.

Early on, COVID-19 modes of transmission and prevention were unclear. Government denials, limited information, lack of credible sources, and unchecked social media proliferation stoked the flames of confusion and fear. Faced with overcrowded emergency rooms and strained healthcare systems, state, and local leaders enacted “best-guess” requirements to control the spread of the virus. The requirements included mask mandates, capacity restrictions, business practice adjustments, curfews, and closures. No

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<sup>2</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “HAN Archive - 00426 | Health Alert Network (HAN),” CDC.gov, <https://emergency.cdc.gov/han/han00426.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> World Health Organization, “WHO COVID-19 Dashboard,” WHO.gov, <https://covid19.who.int/>.

<sup>4</sup> Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, “Trends in Number of COVID-19 Cases and Deaths in the US Reported to CDC, by State/Territory,” CDC.gov, [https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends\\_totalcases\\_select\\_48](https://covid.cdc.gov/covid-data-tracker/#trends_totalcases_select_48).

sector was spared. Whereas COVID-19-related illnesses impacted some, fear and concern touched everyone.

Fatalities and fear are not the only effects of COVID-19. It also resulted in loneliness, as localities instituted quarantine requirements. Quarantine involves physical and social isolation.<sup>5</sup> That isolation may have had a more significant effect than fear and death combined because it impeded one of our most treasured beliefs – freedom.

Americans value freedom. Constitutional articles and amendments codify them. Even more so than mask mandates, quarantine restricts freedom of movement and assembly. Though social media creates greater opportunities for technology-based connectivity, it is not a perfect solution. People still prefer the option to gather. Unfortunately, quarantine and assembly restrictions removed that option. As a result, many became prisoners in their own homes – some quarantined with family and spouses, but others (singles and the elderly) quarantined alone. Medical and mental health professionals continue to explore and report the impacts of forced isolation related to COVID-19. They suggest it will be years before we know the full effects.<sup>6</sup>

COVID-19 also caused spiritual and ecclesiological challenges, just as much as it did physical, emotional, social, and mental health issues. Every industry and gathering place felt the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions, including houses of worship. Never in United States history, and perhaps world history, were so many houses of

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<sup>5</sup> Merriam-Webster, “Quarantine | Definition of Quarantine by Merriam-Webster,” Merriam-Webster, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/quarantine>.

<sup>6</sup> Psychiatric Times, “Mental Health in a Pandemic State: The Route from Social Isolation ...,” Psychiatric Times, <https://www.psychiatrictimes.com/view/mental-health-pandemic-state-route-social-isolation-loneliness>.



worship simultaneously closed for in-person assembly.<sup>7</sup> This void came when many were sober to their mortality and seeking spiritual answers for the crisis. Countless spiritual communities scattered, and spiritual leaders and churches were left scrambling to meet the spiritual needs of a socially distant community. Churches were unprepared to operate in the constrained environment.

### *Churchless*

From a religious and cultural perspective, San Antonio is a unique southern city. The largest religious affiliation in San Antonio is Catholicism. Evangelical Christianity is second, followed by Black Pentecostals. However, most people in San Antonio report no religious affiliation.<sup>8</sup> Also, according to the United States Census, San Antonio has a significant millennial population (the median resident age is 33.7).<sup>9</sup> Given the data, a large portion of the city is relatively young and irreligious – they are churchless. However, this does not mean they are not spiritual. Before the COVID-19 crisis, many in San Antonio, including millennials, may have already been absent from churches. But why? George Barna and David Kinnaman explored this in their 2014 book *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them*.

Barna and Kinnaman examined the current condition of the churchless, the reasons they provide for not attending churches, and how the church today can connect

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<sup>7</sup> Gallup, “Religion and the COVID-19 Virus in the US – Gallup,” Gallup, <https://news.gallup.com/opinion/polling-matters/307619/religion-covid-virus.aspx>.

<sup>8</sup> City-Data.com, “San Antonio, Texas (TX) Profile: Population, Maps, Real Estate ...,” City-Data.com, <https://www.city-data.com/city/San-Antonio-Texas.html>.

<sup>9</sup> US Census Bureau, “US Census Bureau QuickFacts: San Antonio City, Texas; United States,” US Census Bureau, <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/sanantoniocitytexas,US/PST045219>.

with them. Their research, too, revealed a rise in the religiously unaffiliated and unchurched in America. It also showed that a large portion of the ‘churched’ only attend once a month, and a third no longer attend at all.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, sentiments and expectations of those outside the church have waned. Generally, it seems, the church is no longer seen as relevant and necessary to many people who are both churched and unchurched. Perhaps, a perspective on post-modernism can provide further insights into contemporary sentiments surrounding church.

Dr. Peter Bellini, in the Foundations of Evangelism course at United Theological Seminary, proposes the following about the post-modern perspective on church. Some people:

1. Are suspicious of institutions and authority.
2. Are more interested in community building than the church building.
3. Believe lived and relational truth is more important than empirical truth.
4. Are more spiritual than religious. They love Jesus more than the church.
5. Are more missional than liturgical and doctrinal.
6. Value authenticity and community over formalization and structure.<sup>11</sup>

Churches that fail to acknowledge and negotiate these beliefs and sentiments, and employ the technical solutions common to millennials, will miss an opportunity to connect with the context in San Antonio. Some may wonder the value of an organization that appears out of step in times of peace and ineffective in times of crisis.

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<sup>10</sup> George Barna and David Kinnaman, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2014), viii.

<sup>11</sup> Peter Bellini, “EV 501-Foundations of Evangelism” (lecture, United Theological Seminary, Dayton, OH, October 2, 2020), slide 148.

Crisis reveals character. When COVID-19 blanketed San Antonio, it became clear that churches and their leaders were not optimally postured or agile enough to meet the population's needs. At the onset of the pandemic, traditional, in-person worship and Christian education offerings ceased for extended periods. Churches also stopped offering Holy Communion. Additionally, many older churches and church leaders were not equipped to offer streaming services and electronic giving. Consequently, they struggled to meet the community's spiritual needs and the financial demands of their operations. Church leaders also struggled to connect and care for older commuter members who were neither technically savvy nor accurately accounted for in church databases. Sadly, these conditions and constraints widened the gap between faith communities and the general public during the crisis. Overwhelmed, unequipped, and seeking to survive, some churches and their leaders adopted a wait-it-out retreat and retrenchment posture.

Just as COVID-19 created ecclesiastical and spiritual issues, it also presented doctrinal and practical theological challenges for pastors and the unchurched. When some societies sought enlightenment and comfort from a spiritual community, they encountered church leaders entangled and hampered by politics. Pastors grappled with pandemic-related myths, conspiracies, and politics, just as much as they did spiritual matters. Unfortunately, some leaders lacked consistent sound doctrinal and practical solutions to help people face their crisis-related fears.

COVID-19 continues to reveal a church out of touch with the context and community. Likewise, it shows an organization and leadership cadre mired in old

practices, polity, and perspectives that compromise its resilience and relevancy in a time of crisis.

### *Disconnected*

In 2019, “USA Today” reported that the millennial and Generation-Z populations are overwhelmed by loneliness, although they have thousands of friends on social media.<sup>12</sup> In essence, many of them are alone in a crowded virtual room. Loneliness worsened during the COVID-19 restrictions, but the problem existed prior to the pandemic. How did this happen?

San Antonio has a stable economy and offers limitless entertainment opportunities in the immediate area. It is easy for San Antonians to be connected and disconnected simultaneously, especially when they have the financial means to embrace separation and exclusivity over community engagement. However, there are costs to unplugging from the community. Disconnecting can cause one to lose the value of human interaction, miss relational growth opportunities, and overlook communal cohesiveness and cultural sensitivity. Likewise, personal resiliency weakens when isolation is persistent.<sup>13</sup>

During COVID-19, there was a seismic shift to offer operations, remote work, entertainment, education, worship services, and engagement online. Streaming and

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<sup>12</sup> Sharon Jayson, “Millennial, Gen Z Are Most-Connected Americans, and Loneliest,” *Kaiser Health News*, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/health/2019/03/07/millennial-generation-z-social-media-connected-loneliness-cigna-health-study/3090013002/>.

<sup>13</sup> Giata Pietrabissa and Susan G. Simpson, “Psychological Consequences of Social Isolation During COVID-19 Outbreak,” *Frontiers in Psychology* 11 (2020): 2201, <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2020.02201>.

virtual meeting forums experienced a surge in use.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, what was once a panacea is now problematic because people are experiencing online fatigue. The same is true with online worship. According to Lifeway Research, virtual ministry is more exhausting than it is uplifting.<sup>15</sup> Inevitably, an exclusively virtual ministry may lead to a disconnected dynamic among citizens, communities, and churches.

Ultimately, COVID-19 revealed seams in crisis response, the church, and community connectivity. People who once eschewed and discounted community connectivity longed for it – especially the faith communities. Isolation and the awareness of mortality sparked a curiosity about the cause of the crisis and the meaning of life. Eventually, churches found ways to navigate their new environment and connect. Online worship and religious education spiked. Church leaders maintained a presence but did not advance and innovate. During this time, Cleft of the Rock Church not only survived, but it thrived. A closer look at its leader and ministry focus offers some insight.

### **Ministry Focus**

Resilient people view a crisis as a growth opportunity. Resilience is the ability to adjust, respond, return, or recover from being stretched, challenged, or disrupted through circumstances, conditions, or crises.<sup>16</sup> Succinctly put, resilience is the ability to bounce back and lean forward in trying times.

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<sup>14</sup> Rahul De', Neena Pandey, and Abhipsa Pal, "Impact of Digital Surge During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Viewpoint on Research and Practice," *International Journal for Information Management* 55, no. 10217 (June 9, 2020): 102171, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijinfomgt.2020.102171>.

<sup>15</sup> Ken Braddy, "7 Coping Strategies for Virtual Ministry Exhaustion," Lifeway Research, August 31, 2020, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2020/08/31/7-coping-strategies-for-virtual-ministry-exhaustion/>.

<sup>16</sup> Dictionary.com, "Resilience," Dictionary.com, <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/resilience>.

Cleft of the Rock Church is a church plant that embraces shifts and responds with resiliency and innovation. Culturally, the church is a predominately African American, middle-class, and military-affiliated church. I planted the church with seven members five years ago. Before launching the ministry, I served in the United States Air Force for twenty-four years, retiring from the Pentagon in the rank of Chief Master Sergeant (CMSgt). Both the organization level and rank are significant achievements. A CMSgt is the pinnacle of the enlisted force. Only the top one percent of the Air Force holds the rank. Likewise, the hiring process to work at the Pentagon is highly competitive and only the most seasoned and successful are selected.

My background includes large group management and executive leadership. Before working at the Pentagon, I was a command executive for five thousand employees. Later, while working at the Pentagon as the Air Force Chief of Enlisted Force Development, I was responsible for developing a global workforce of 230 thousand members, including senior leaders. After retiring, I worked as an external advisory consultant to thirty-five small business owners and executive teams from diverse industries. Later, I launched a consulting firm and continued as a business advisor in an entrepreneur capacity.

While serving in the military and as an entrepreneur, I continued my education to sharpen my people and organizational leadership skills. In 1998, I earned an undergraduate degree in Workforce Development. I graduated with a Master of Business Administration degree in 2013. Additionally, I completed executive education from the University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, and later I earned a Master of Ministry from the United Theological Seminary. I am also a published author and Senior

Certified Professional through the Society for Human Resource Management on people and organizational strategy. Studying and writing about organizational leadership and culture calibrates my ministry focus and leadership style. Altogether, my experiences and academic preparation taught me the importance of community, resilience, and innovation.

If the family is the cornerstone of society, communities are the studs that strengthen the walls of the world. I grew up in the inner city, and the community taught me how to survive on limited resources. During those times, buying or replacing things with something new was an anomaly. Early on, we learned to fix and figure things out, drawing on the resources in the community. Similarly, during each crisis I encountered as a child, the community helped. From gross domestic violence to poor personal decisions, the community was the cradle that carried me beyond the crisis. Community leaders need to recognize the character-forming value of community and view it as part of the cure for crisis.

I learned resilience during military service. Military members are expected to survive and thrive in less than perfect circumstances. In 1988, the military coined the term V.U.C.A. to describe an austere operating environment. The acronym V.U.C.A. stands for volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous.<sup>17</sup> To ensure success, military members gain resilience through repetitive education, training, and experience linked to V.U.C.A. spaces.

It was also during my military service and, later, business, that I learned about organizational innovation. Human resources, programs, processes, and logistics chains experienced constant disruption. Positive results were not tied to perfect conditions, they

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<sup>17</sup> US Army Heritage and Education Center, “Who First Originated the Term V.U.C.A. (Volatility, Uncertainty, Complex and Ambiguous),” US Army Heritage and Education Center, May 7, 2019, <https://usawc.libanswers.com/faq/84869>.

flowed from ingenuity. Oftentimes, innovation moved the mission forward. I found the same to be true in business. As an entrepreneur and business advisor, I crafted innovative solutions to ensure my clients optimized productivity and profitability. They required solutions despite limited resources, and my compensation was linked to their success.

In each of these roles, military leader, business advisor, and entrepreneur, I flourished because of resilience and innovation. Learning to see beyond the crises and operate in less than perfect circumstances became the norm. In retrospect, these experiences were building blocks. They provided road maps for negotiating the inevitable shifts associated with church planting. In fact, one may argue that church planters and entrepreneurs have similar DNA.

Before planting Cleft of the Rock Church, I carried a burden on my heart from the Lord that I could not shake. That burden led me to retire early from the Air Force. Later, the weight triggered me to leave corporate America. Finally, a moment of clarity occurred. In a Houston hotel room, God revealed that my calling was to launch a community. Initially, I was confused. I understood what it meant to start a church and a business, but launching a community sounded odd. So, I leaned on the skills I learned growing up, in the military, corporate America, college, and as an entrepreneur. Most of the competencies translated well to my new church-planting context. However, I could not see a straight line to the community-building command that God spoke. Thankfully, through each successive organizational shift, God's words grew clearer.

Since launching the church in 2016, Cleft of the Rock Church has experienced a series of successful shifts. While the shifts have been uncomfortable, they ultimately led to growth and a stronger community. Each shift is discussed below.



### ***Shift One***

Initially, the eight-person launch team strategized in my home. After searching for available space for weeks, we found a hotel that rented us a small room to host our first church service. We expected a few attendees but were amazed when many of our friends, family members, and strangers decided to worship with us. The number waned a bit from the inaugural service, but then a shift occurred. Subsequently, we outgrew our small room and required additional space to accommodate the growth. Also, during this period, God revealed the long-term location for the permanent church. However, permanently planting roots was still far off. First-time guests showed up sporadically, but attendance was solid. During this shift, weekly attendance was sixty-five and the average membership was thirty.

### ***Shift Two***

Eventually, the hotel decided to shift gears. They gave us a three-week contract termination notice. After hosting church in a community park, we searched for another location to replant the church. Eventually, God provided a church-sharing opportunity, and we shifted from the hotel and park into a borrowed space. The only service time available was 2:00 p.m. As a result, attendance dipped but later rebounded. Six weeks later, we shifted again and signed a lease on a rented space inside a strip mall. Again, we replanted the church. Our community proved resilient, and the replant was a success. During this shift, weekly attendance was 100, and the average membership was ninety.

### ***Shift Three***

The size and layout of the rented unit accommodated Christian education and worship. With the help of our resilient leadership team and community, we renovated the space in ten days and held our first worship service. Immediately, the church multiplied. Routinely, our children's church operated at maximum capacity, and we looked for more units to rent in the strip mall to plan for a future expansion. Shortly after that, an opportunity presented itself to double our space at double the cost. As a church, we prayed. However, we did not receive confirmation from the Lord to rent more space in the strip mall. God's plan was not clear, but eventually we understood God was preparing us for another shift. During this shift, the weekly attendance was 175 and the average membership was 140.

### ***Shift Four***

A few months later, we purchased five acres and a small building in the exact location that God revealed three years prior while worshipping in the hotel. Our land search led us across San Antonio. However, each deal failed to materialize until we focused our search on the area God initially revealed to us. After buying the land, we continued to operate in the strip mall space. Surprisingly, shortly after the deal closed, the COVID-19 crisis prevented us from safely worshipping inside the building. In response, we shifted our strategy to ensure resilience and connectivity, while preparing again to replant during a crisis. During this shift, the average attendance was 175 and the average membership was 160.

### ***Shift Five***

During the pandemic, we retooled our organization strategy and replanted the church. The three main objectives of the new strategy were dynamic online small groups, safe drive-in worship, and small building renovation. Small groups were designed to offer Christian education and connect the community in small clusters between Sundays. Renovating the small building on the land created an indoor space to launch outreach efforts, record ministry content, and stream worship services when inclement weather prevented outside operations. However, drive-in service became our central focus.

Drive-in and outdoor worship are not new concepts. Historically, strangers and congregants have gathered in cars and tents to worship or attend crusades and revivals. However, the practice was no longer mainstream before COVID-19 because people worshipped in houses, strip malls, churches, convention centers, or stadiums. In response to restrictions on indoor gatherings, some churches began to offer outdoor, drive-in style worship. Initially, the seemingly innovative practice generated excitement. However, over time, offering outdoor services in addition to online services proved too labor-intensive. Attendance at some outdoor services waned. Perhaps the novelty of the idea wore thin, since churches only viewed it as a stopgap measure to hold out until restrictions lifted. The longer the restrictions lasted, the less committed churches were to drive-in worship.

However, Cleft of the Rock Church fully embraced drive-in style worship as its primary mode of worship and communion. During the pandemic our leadership team read *The Obstacle is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials in Triumph* by Ryan Holiday. Holiday's premise is that whatever barrier gets in your way becomes (or is part

of) the new way.<sup>18</sup> For this reason, we invested in a professional outdoor stage and sound package that cost tens of thousands of dollars. Our setup crew and logistics team expanded to handle the outdoor operations. Similarly, our ushers shifted their procedures to accommodate and welcome neighborhood visitors. Also, local, and national recording artists visited to offer a concert-type experience. Everyone accepted additional responsibilities to ensure safe, socially distanced worship. Thankfully, the community responded. Each week, throngs of visitors and members attended drive-in church and worshipped online.

Initially, the goal was to replant to the land as a short-term alternative. However, drive-in worship enabled us to offer normalcy and communion to a seeking community during a crisis. The years of shifting, resilience, and replanting facilitated innovation and success during a global pandemic. While other churches adopted a hold-on and holdout posture, Cleft of the Rock Church embraced a help-forward strategy. As we celebrated the success of our strategy, another shift loomed on the horizon. During this shift, the average attendance (including online) was 400 and average membership was 270.

### ***Shift Six***

In the fifth year of the church's existence, we received a three-million-dollar loan to build a church, childcare, and community center! The design rendering mirrored the vision God gave in 2017. Also, harkening back to God's words in that Houston hotel room in 2016, Cleft of the Rock Church became a resilient community before

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<sup>18</sup> Ryan Holiday, *The Obstacle Is the Way: The Timeless Art of Turning Trials into Triumph* (New York, NY: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014), 6.

constructing a church building. During this shift, the average attendance (including online) was 400 and the average membership was 300.

Unquestionably, more shifts are ahead. Some will be crisis-related and others natural next steps. However, the church community continues to navigate the potentially V.U.C.A. environment with the same strategic resilience and innovation used to replant the church through repeated shifts and disruptions.

### **Synergy**

The church needs strategic and resilient leaders, skilled in strategic crisis innovation. Unfortunately, seminaries limit personal resilience to a subset of spiritual formation and miss an opportunity to fully connect it to crisis leadership. Moreover, learning objectives related to crisis preparation are limited to prayer, counseling, and clinical pastoral education. This, too, fails to plunge the depths of the topic of crisis-resilient leaders and organizations. As a result, pastors and church leaders settle for crisis response, which is more reactive than intentional and innovative. Sadly, a crisis response posture typically results in a retreat and retrenchment strategy. The academy, and church leaders, need a course of study similar to the ones found in the business sector that address crisis leadership competencies.

My time in the ministry and leadership spans a quarter of a century. I have led at every organizational level – from frontline worker to executive – in the nonprofit, public, and private sectors. Those experiences prepared our church to thrive and replant during the COVID-19 crisis.

While working at the Pentagon, my portfolio included mapping organizational leadership competencies to capabilities. Those competencies and capabilities became learning objectives for on-the-job training programs, schools, and professional education seminars. As a result, the Air Force produced leaders who possessed the competencies and capabilities our community needed during contingencies.

Competency models are standard in educational psychology. They identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities organizations expect from their team members and leaders. While competencies form the basic building blocks and expectations for training and performance, they must be tailored and graduated based on employees' roles and responsibilities. For instance, executive leaders are required to have an enterprise and global perspective, while front-line workers focus on tactical customer encounter orientation or production. Both are important competencies. However, executive competencies differ in that they address multiple functional communities across the entire company. To be clear, competency models are not performance standards, but they are the frameworks upon which performance standards rest.

Leadership competency models have common features. They primarily focus on five areas – business, people, personal, externals, and results. While there are many leadership competencies, they are typically organized around these major headers. Also, there are models for crisis leadership that contain similar competencies. These competencies address situational awareness, decisiveness, relationships, innovation, resilience, external engagement, and emergency operations. Each model and framework include variations of these competencies.

Church leaders also have distinctive competencies. Some, but not all, overlap the aforementioned leadership and crisis competencies. Also, different church leaders may be predisposed to specific competencies. For example, some leaders gravitate to managing people, while others are more comfortable as prophetic proclaimers. Likewise, some are risk-averse institutional experts, while others (like serial church planters) have an entrepreneurial, risk-taking orientation.

There are several important questions to consider. How did the leaders get these competencies – nature or nurture? Were they effective during the COVID-19 pandemic? Can crisis leadership competencies for pastors be codified and used in tailored training to produce additional resilient and innovative church leaders?

### **Summary**

Unquestionably, COVID-19 will produce many lessons learned and case studies. The pandemic's physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and mental effects will linger for years. Clearly, changing the past is impossible. Nevertheless, equipping leaders and churches for future crises is essential. What if church leaders and teams possessed the competencies needed for inevitable crises and seismic shifts? Churches and the communities they serve will not only survive but also thrive during crises. We owe this to church leaders and the communities they serve. Failure to do so is tantamount to ministerial and ministry malpractice.

I propose a study in my context that includes a strategic gap analysis to examine the readiness of pastors for crisis innovation. The primary purpose is not to explore programs churches offered during the pandemic, but to assess crisis leadership

competencies pastors possess related to resilience and innovation. I will then use the data to develop and deliver a Church Replant Seminar for pastors, focusing on crisis competency and innovation. Formative and summative evaluations will measure their learning.

I expect to learn that most pastors receive very little education and training on crisis resilience and organizational innovation. Ultimately, communities connect and benefit from churches that display a resilient and innovative culture during a crisis.



## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS**

Violence shatters lives like crises fracture communities. Thankfully, a crisis can also lead to unity in communities. Historically, countless people have converted their pain into progress and ushered peace in chaotic communities. In the face of a crisis, this type of courage galvanizes the community and helps it forward. The narrative of the passion and resurrection found in Matthew's gospel offers a sterling example of crisis leadership.

Matthew 28:1-10 depicts crisis leadership and community resiliency. The women who witness Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection are akin to mothers of a movement. Despite the catastrophic event of the crucifixion, these women resiliently and courageously support Jesus and the young Christian community in the most trying times. What emboldens them? What life experiences and leadership competencies do they possess to survive tragedy, champion continuity, and restore normalcy? What leadership competencies can the church learn from these women and employ in communities that seek to rebound with resiliency from the current pandemic?

This text provides a relevant biblical foundation that advances the notion that character and competency fuel crisis recovery in communities. What follows is an exegetical examination of Matthew 28:1-10. It includes the narrative; literary, historical,

and social context; synthesis; and implications for the doctoral project on crisis leadership and community resiliency.

While it is impossible to discover the true nature of the leaders listed in Matthew 28:1-10, it is plausible to examine their context and actions that led to positive outcomes. Discovering how the women in this passage helped restore a crisis-fractured community enables the academy and church to produce practitioners skilled in crisis leadership and community resiliency. Leaders and communities that lack these critical skills struggle to survive and thrive during a crisis.

### **Exegesis**

#### Matthew 28:1-10 (NKJV)

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, “Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you.” So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. And as they went to tell His disciples, behold, Jesus met them, saying, “Rejoice!” So they came and held Him by the feet and worshiped Him. Then Jesus said to them, “Do not be afraid. Go and tell My brethren to go to Galilee, and there they will see Me” (Matt. 28:1-10, NKJV).<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Biblical citations are from the New King James Version, unless otherwise noted, Matthew 28:1-10.

*Literary Context: Narrative*

Matthew chapter twenty-eight is a seminal passage for Christians. It is the foundation of the Christian faith, the commission of the church, and the hope of the future. W. F. Albright and C. S. Mann posit that the trauma of the passion and joy of the resurrection birthed a new community.<sup>2</sup> To capture the true essence of Matthew 28:1-10, it is also important to consider adjoining passages and other gospel writers.

Unsurprisingly, Donald Hagner, a *Word Biblical Commentary* contributor, suggests 27:55-28:20 is a single unit of scripture.<sup>3</sup> While the central focus and exegesis herein covers the selected text, the additional sources and selections add clarity to the context. In Matthew's gospel, women are companions of Jesus and the disciples. While Matthew 27:55 is the first mention of the women. Luke 8:1-3 notes that Mary Magdalene and other women from Galilee were early followers.<sup>4</sup>

Matthew chapter twenty-eight opens with two women – both named Mary – visiting the tomb of Jesus. Mary Magdalene is one of the women, and her companion is referred to as “the other Mary,” whose sons are James and Joses. Before they visit the tomb on the Sabbath, Matthew records that both women see the crucifixion and burial (27:55-61). This point is important to the narrative and its general purpose. W. D. Davies and Dale Allison eloquently write, “The women lend credibility and continuity to the story by serving as eyewitnesses to the kerygmatic triad: Jesus died, was buried, and was

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<sup>2</sup> William Foxwell Albright and C. S. Mann, trans., *The Anchor Bible: Matthew*, vol. 26 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1971), xxi.

<sup>3</sup> Donald A Hagner and Bruce Manning Metzger, *Matthew 14-28*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker, *Word Biblical Commentary*, vol. 33B (Nashville, TN: Word Books, 1995), 854.

<sup>4</sup> W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (Edinburgh, UK: T and T Clark, 1988), 637.

raised.”<sup>5</sup> Their repeated presence validates and strengthens their proclamation to the scattered disciples and fractured community.<sup>6</sup>

Unlike the other gospel writers, Matthew forgoes comments about the women purchasing spices for proper burial preparation. While some debate the time of the tomb visit (evening or early morning), Matthew's succinct account singularly focuses on the power of the resurrection.<sup>7</sup> The women endure an earthquake and encounter an angelic being that opens the tomb and announces the resurrection. This is the second earthquake they experience during the period of the passion and resurrection. Days prior, after Jesus' death, Matthew writes about an earthquake, open tombs, and resurrected dead saints (27:45-54). Hagner suggests the historicity of the resurrected righteous is hyperbole aimed at foreshadowing and sensationalizing the importance of Jesus' death and its connection to Jewish apocalyptic writings.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, the text indicates fear grips the guards at the grave and the women. After they receive instruction to tell the disciples about the resurrection and rendezvous with Jesus in Galilee, the women's fear turn to joy.

Matthew's earlier comments about the guards (27:64) again confirming the disciples' absence from the burial and resurrection. Mary Magdalene and her female companion visited the tomb alone the morning of the resurrection.<sup>9</sup> As the women leave the tomb, Matthew says that Mary Magdalene meets a risen Jesus who encourages rejoicing! In response, Mary Magdalene grabs Jesus' feet and worships him. While an

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<sup>5</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 637.

<sup>6</sup> Hagner and Metzger, *Matthew 14-28*, 855.

<sup>7</sup> Craig Evans, *Matthew* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 477.

<sup>8</sup> Hagner and Metzger, *Matthew 14-28*, 851.

<sup>9</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 655.

empty tomb is inspiring, an in-person encounter is irrefutable evidence. Conceivably, Matthew includes this to confirm to the community that Mary's touch confirmed Jesus' resurrection. According to Craig Evans, the early patristics and commentators espouse this belief.<sup>10</sup> Again, Mary receives the command to go and tell the disciples about the resurrection and re-gather in Galilee. In the end, the women who initially encounter Jesus as patients and followers become witnesses to a community of disciples in a crisis-related retreat.

### *Structure*

Several structures and outlines exist for the Gospel of Matthew. Many writers add lines of demarcation between discourses, while some organize it by themes. Contrarily, others outline the book based on geography. Each is value-added and purposeful in its way. However, it is essential to consider critical literary features of the gospel prior to offering an outline.

### *Author*

While its authorship is not without dissent, most attribute the Gospel of Matthew to Jesus' disciple named Matthew. In the early second century, Bishop Papias associated the writing with the apostle, and acceptance spread. While some suggest an earlier date for the writing of Matthew's gospel, Craig Evans dates it between AD 70 and 80. He, like others, use Jesus' life events and teachings as artifacts to arrive at this conclusion.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 479.

<sup>11</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 4.

### *Genre*

Peter Bellinzoni highlights the genre of the early writers in his book, *The Building Blocks of the Earliest Gospel: A Road Map to Early Christian Biography*. Four types of literature – gospels, history, letters, and apocalypse – comprise what we call the New Testament. The Book of Matthew, along with Mark, Luke, and John, belong to the gospel genre. Within the gospels, there are pronouncements, miracle stories, parables, sayings, and legends.

The word gospel comes from the transliterated Greek word euangelion “good news”. The gospels are akin to Greco-Roman biographies. In that genre, casting the subject in the most favorable light outweighs historical accuracy.<sup>12</sup> Though exaggeration is common in that style, Hubbard suggests it should not cast a shadow over omissions and inclusions in the different gospel narratives.<sup>13</sup>

Generally, Matthew’s gospel is written in narrative form. Moreover, Albright and Mann assert that Matthew’s arrangement fuses the sterile features of an instruction manual “vade mecum” with the wise sayings of a teacher.<sup>14</sup> Particularly, Matthew uses narrative speech in 28:1-10.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Arthur J. Bellinzoni, *The Building Blocks of the Earliest Gospel* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 2-4.

<sup>13</sup> Hagner and Metzger, *Matthew 14-28*, 869.

<sup>14</sup> Albright and Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, ix.

<sup>15</sup> Hagner and Metzger, *Matthew 14-28*, 869.

### *Source*

The synoptic gospels consist of the writings of Mark, Matthew, and Luke. The word synoptic comes from two words meaning, “seen together.”<sup>16</sup> Each of the three gospels includes a significant amount of similar information, unlike the Gospel of John. It is a commonly held belief that Mark is the oldest gospel, and Matthew and Luke borrow heavily from it and other sources. One theory suggests that Matthew consulted both the Gospel of Mark and another document commonly referred to as “Q,” when writing his gospel. The “Q” is a shortened version of the word Quelle, which is German for source.<sup>17</sup>

### *Themes*

Matthew employs themes and motifs to convey his message. According to Albright and Mann, one of Matthew’s key themes focuses on a Christian community. They propose that Matthew weave themes around the concept of establishing and maintaining a new community of commonality and goodwill, as opposed to one that celebrates and rewards individuality and privilege. Matthew also theologically links ecclesiology to eschatology through themes about the community, passion, and resurrection.<sup>18</sup> Ultimately, for Matthew, the first community exists in a mutually beneficial relationship that eventually leads to an eternal society.

Interconnected themes and motifs in Matthew’s gospel underscore the importance of the inception, resilience, and witness of the Jesus community. Specifically, in both

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<sup>16</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 7.

<sup>17</sup> Albright and Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, xxi.

<sup>18</sup> Albright and Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, lxxxiii-iv.

chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight, the motif of witnesses takes center stage. The women witness the events of the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection, and then they are commissioned to go to a community in crisis as witnesses of hope.

*Keywords: Interlinear Greek*

In Matthew 28:1-10, recurring keywords illuminate Matthew's message. In these short verses, there are variations of the words "see" and "seek." Likewise, "say" and "tell" repeat. Finally, "go" and "gone" are mentioned multiple times. Keywords, Greek origins, and meanings from the Interlinear Bible are cataloged below.<sup>19</sup> Additionally, this review includes Matthew's potential intent of use.

"See" and "seek" appear five times	"Say" and "tell" appear three times	"Came," "go," "gone" appears eight times
<p>Matthew 28:1 θεωρῆσαι</p> <p>Origin θεωρέω = 2334 (Strong's) = to see</p> <p>Use: I look at, gaze, behold; I see, experience, discern; I partake of.</p> <p>Matthew 28:5 ζητεῖτε</p> <p>ζητέω = 2212 (Strong's) = search; get to the bottom of</p> <p>Use: I seek, search for, desire, require, demand.</p> <p>Matthew 28:6</p>	<p>Matthew 28:7 εἶπατε</p> <p>Origin ἔπω = 2036 (Strong's) = bring word</p> <p>Use: answer, bid, bring word, command</p> <p>Matthew 28:8 (tell) ἀπαγγεῖλαι</p> <p>Origin ἀπαγγέλλω = 518 (Strong's) = to report, announce</p> <p>Use: I report (from one place to another), bring a report, announce, declare.</p> <p>Matthew 28:9 (tell)</p>	<p>Matthew 28:1 ἦλθεν</p> <p>Origin ἔρχομαι = 2064 (Strong's) = came, go</p> <p>Use: I come, go.</p> <p>Matthew 28:6 δεῦτε</p> <p>Origin δεῦτε = 1205 (Strong's) = come!</p> <p>Use: come hither, come, hither, an exclamatory word.</p> <p>Matthew 28:7 πορευθεῖσαι</p> <p>Origin πορεύομαι = 4198</p>

<sup>19</sup> Bible Hub, "Matthew 28 Interlinear Bible," Biblehub.com, <https://biblehub.com/interlinear/matthew/28.htm>.



“See” and “seek” appear five times	“Say” and “tell” appear three times	“Came,” “go,” “gone” appears eight times
<p>ἴδετε</p> <p>Origin ὁράω = 3708 (Strong’s) = to see perceive or attend to</p> <p>Use: I see, look upon, experience, perceive, discern, beware. (The underlying usage of this term is to also spiritually see).</p> <p>Matthew 28:7 ὄψεσθε</p> <p>Origin ὁράω = 3708 (Strong’s) = to see perceive or attend to</p> <p>Use: I see, look upon, experience, perceive, discern, beware. (The underlying usage of this term is to also spiritually see).</p> <p>Matthew 28:10 ὄψονται</p> <p>Origin ὁράω = 3708 (Strong’s) = to see perceive or attend to</p> <p>I see, look upon, experience, perceive, discern, beware.</p> <p>Use: The underlying usage of this term is to also spiritually see</p>	<p>ἀπαγγεῖλαι</p> <p>Origin ἀπαγγέλλω = 518 (Strong’s) = to report, announce</p> <p>Use: I report (from one place to another), bring a report, announce, declare.</p> <p>Matthew 28:10 (tell) ἀπαγγεῖλατε</p> <p>Origin ἀπαγγέλλω = 518 (Strong’s) = to report, announce</p> <p>Use: I report (from one place to another), bring a report, announce, declare.</p>	<p>(Strong’s) = to go</p> <p>Use: I travel, journey, go, die.</p> <p>Matthew 28:8 ἀπελθοῦσαι</p> <p>Origin ἀπέρχομαι = 565 (Strong’s) = to go away, go after</p> <p>Use: I come or go away from, depart, return, arrive, go after, follow.</p> <p>Matthew 28:9 προσελθοῦσαι</p> <p>Origin προσέρχομαι = 4334 (Strong’s) = to approach, to draw near</p> <p>Use: I come up to, come to, come near (to), approach, consent (to).</p> <p>Matthew 28:9 ἐπορεύοντο</p> <p>Origin πορεύομαι = 4198 (Strong’s) = to go</p> <p>Use: I travel, journey, go, die.</p> <p>Matthew 28:10 ὑπάγετε</p> <p>Origin ὑπάγω = 5217 (Strong’s) = to lead or bring under, to lead on slowly, to depart</p>

“See” and “seek” appear five times	“Say” and “tell” appear three times	“Came,” “go,” “gone” appears eight times
		<p>Use: I go away, depart, begone, die.</p> <p>Matthew 28:10 ἀπελθοῦσαι</p> <p>Origin ἀπέρχομαι = 565 (Strong’s) = to go away, go after</p> <p>Use: I come or go away from, depart, return, arrive, go after, follow</p>

Table 1. Interlinear Greek

*Intent of Use*

See: The women came to see the tomb. The supernatural acts and separated stone shift them from seeing to searching. The angel commands them to take a closer spiritual look. The angel then invites them to Galilee for spiritually eye-opening experience. The women both witness and become witnesses to the disciples and the community. Eventually, both the women and disciples will see and meet Jesus in Galilee.

*Came, Go, Gone*

Based on the Greek, the women and disciples are encouraged to “journey to another place, depart and follow.” One variation means “to die.” Perhaps, it is an invitation to die to what they knew in order to live and see the risen Jesus again in Galilee. Again, the women witness the supernatural events surrounding the resurrection. Then, they are sent to tell the community to regroup and go meet Jesus.

### *Tell and Say*

The women are encouraged to take an answer to the disciples. They also receive instruction from both the angelic being and Jesus. It then becomes their responsibility to take what they have learned to the community and make an emphatic announcement about what they know and where Jesus will meet them – Galilee. Again, using various Greek words to sharpen the message, Matthew indicates the women receive instruction to go and tell.

### *Outline*

The outline below includes the focus passage and adjoining verses. Davies and Allison's comments in the *International Critical Commentary* support this inclusion. They note that the women first appear in Matthew 27:55, and suggest Matthew uses the ensuing verses to create a narrative bridge between the crucifixion, and the resurrection in Matthew chapter twenty-eight.<sup>20</sup> From a literary standpoint, its inclusion supports Matthew's theme of the witnessing witnesses.

### *Matthew Chapter Twenty-Seven*

#### I. The death (vv. 45-56)

1. (Women witness, vv. 55-56)

#### II. The burial (vv. 57-66)

1. Joseph asks for the body (v. 57)
2. Joseph buries the body (v. 59)

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<sup>20</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 647.

3. (Women witness, v. 61)

### *Matthew Chapter Twenty-Eight*

#### III. The tomb (vv.1-8)

1. Women at the tomb (v.1)
2. Earthquake and an angel (vv. 2-3)
3. Guards in fear (v. 4)
4. Angel's message – no fear, Jesus is alive, go tell (vv. 5-7)
  - a. Angel's instruction: come and see, then go and tell.

#### IV. The appearance of the risen Jesus (v. 8-10)

1. Women depart (v. 8)
2. Women encounter and worship Jesus (v. 9)
  - a. Jesus's command: don't fear, go and tell.
3. Women receive the commission to go tell the disciples (v. 10)

#### V The people's response (vv. 11-17)

#### VI. Great commission (vv. 18-20)

## **Historical Context**

### *Audience*

While themes, keywords, structure, and (sometimes) historical events are quickly identified, the audience and purpose are not always clear. Evans suggests that Matthew writes to both a Jewish and new Christian community grappling with unrest, and likely,

the recent destruction of the temple.<sup>21</sup> If the gospel of Matthew follows the destruction of the temple, both groups require resilience in a temple-less, oppressive environment. Likewise, a kingdom and community-now message, with the historically linked Messiah at the center, would be a message worth considering by those searching for spiritual answers. Matthew's message of a new community has appeal.

Unlike Mark, Matthew focuses his efforts on linking the new community to Jewish history. Matthew's genealogy-centric introduction distinguishes his gospel and intent from Mark's. Matthew meticulously meters Jesus Jewish roots and royal lineage, while Mark, in his opening, punctuates Jesus' deity ("Son of God" ... "Messiah"). In doing so, Evans writes, Mark aims at the "imperial cult and divine emperor" concept of the Roman Empire.<sup>22</sup> However, Matthew is not interested in that fight. Matthew's readers, familiar with Nero's chaotic reign, untimely end, and the series of his short-tenured successors require different message.<sup>23</sup> Unquestionably, it was a time of great uncertainty and change. In response, Matthew focuses on the concept of kingdom community and subtly, yet progressively, makes the case that it is a continuation of Jewish history that culminates with a resurrected Messiah. This message speaks comfort to chaos.

Some situate the writing of Matthew in Syria or Antioch. Antioch, because the writer uses language that references urbanized settings instead of small towns. Conversely, others propose Syria because Matthew's gospel is one of the few instances the location is mentioned. They suppose the specificity of the mention in Matthew 4:24 is

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<sup>21</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Evans, 32.

<sup>23</sup> Evans, 403.

related to the writer's residence; otherwise, he would list a city consistent with Mark's gospels.<sup>24</sup> Regardless of location, Matthew's message of a new community would appeal to a Jewish and Gentile audience grappling with identity, enduring uncertainty and trials, and shifting in an ever-changing Roman-ruled society.

### *Social Context (Perspectives, Places, and People)*

Matthew's specific purpose for writing his gospel is debatable. If precepts are clues to purpose, validating an author's original writing is essential. However, as Peter Bellinzoni notes, the early writers' genuine autographs (original writings) are difficult to authenticate and analyze because of codification, translation, and modification issues. He further asserts that multiple changes (inadvertent and intentional) exist in early Christian writings from the first century.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, understanding the social context provides the best clues about intent. Social context includes perspectives, places, and people. Matthew 28:1-10, is replete with contextual clues that perhaps offer insight into his overall purpose for the gospel.

First, the author's characterization of Jesus points to his desire to catalog Jesus' teachings and present him as Israel's long-awaited Messiah. Given the recent destruction of the temple and its rituals, Matthew's young community is eager to document Jesus' teachings that are central to the community's religious life.<sup>26</sup> The author uses Old Testament scripture, sensational imagery, and Greco-Roman biographical writing style to translate oral history into a written work that builds the case of a worthy hero named

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<sup>24</sup> Evans, 5.

<sup>25</sup> Bellinzoni, *The Building Blocks of the Earliest Gospel*, 1.

<sup>26</sup> Albright and Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, xii.

Jesus. Given Matthew's writing style, both his message and virgin-born hero appeal to multiple faith communities.<sup>27</sup> A Jesus, versed in Torah, skilled at miracles, and victorious over death, is a compelling message for those navigating uncertainty and seeking hope. Additionally, in Matthew 28:1-10, the writer presents a conquering king who builds a new community. That is a message of unparalleled hope.

Second, Matthew's reference to a rendezvous in Galilee offers another clue about the social context. According to Albright and Mann, during the early years of the church, fractures were forming. They suspect that the Judea-based followers of the recently executed apostle James favored a Jewish-centric mission. However, those in Galilee embrace an outward, Gentile-reaching ministry. The conflict leads Matthew to place particular and repeated emphasis on Jesus' instructions to Mary about a gathering in Galilee.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, a resurrected Jesus could, and did meet his apostles at different locations. However, Matthew purposefully accentuates Galilee in 28:1-10.

Third, and perhaps most important, is Matthew's casting of Mary Magdalene as the lead witness to the resurrection. The gospel repeatedly points out the women followers who witness the death, burial, and resurrection—a startling fact for Matthew and the budding Christian community. While misogynistic sentiment was not universal in every first-century culture, generally, women were not considered reputable star witnesses.<sup>29</sup> Sadly, at that time, even some tenants and teachers of Judaism espouse dismissive hostility toward women, questioning their wit and worthiness. Therefore,

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<sup>27</sup> Evans, *Matthew*, 40.

<sup>28</sup> Albright and Mann, *The Anchor Bible*, 349.

<sup>29</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 661.

strategically, casting a woman as the lead witness to the resurrection of a hero is unwise – unless the writer and community accept her testimony as truth.<sup>30</sup>

Carla Ricci, in *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus*, also notes the multiple mentions about women at the passion, burial, and resurrection. Additionally, she highlights the one woman who is repeatedly mentioned – Mary Magdalene. According to Ricci, not only is Mary mentioned repeatedly, but her name is often listed first. From a literary standpoint, this may denote Mary's importance and leadership role.<sup>31</sup> In addition to the gospels, Ricci writes that apocryphal, Gnostic, and contemporary works from the first through the third century depict Mary as a leader in the first community.<sup>32</sup> Counter to current beliefs, the gospels do not describe Mary as a prostitute. Perhaps, according to Ricci, that is a later development based on exegetical distortion.<sup>33</sup> So, who is Mary Magdalene?

Luke's gospel introduces Mary and "other women" (8:1-3). According to Luke, Jesus heals evil spirits and infirmities in Galilee. While there, he exorcises seven demons from Mary. Critical writers like Ricci suggest Mary had a physical, not spiritual, issue. Ricci further posits that the context and syncretism of New Testament Jewish culture inordinately links illness etiology, pathology, and prognosis to demon possession and

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<sup>30</sup> Craig S. Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1993), 130.

<sup>31</sup> Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women Who Followed Jesus*, trans. Paul Burns (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1994), 139.

<sup>32</sup> Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others*, 146-148.

<sup>33</sup> Ricci, *Mary Magdalene*, 148-150.



exorcism. That concept of demonology was not prevalent in the context of Old Testament writing.<sup>34</sup>

As a result of their encounter with Jesus, Luke, and other gospel writers, identify the women from Galilee as followers and students of Jesus. While female patron support of rabbis is acceptable in the culture, becoming a student is scandalous.<sup>35</sup> From scripture, Mary, perhaps more so than the disciples, made following Jesus her life's mission. Therefore, when Jesus experiences the most trying and triumphant moments in life, Mary Magdalene and the women are present when others are absent.

The social impact of making Mary the star witness is two-fold. Matthew's Jesus consorts with commoners and even the ill repute. Further, the gospel writer's theme of community building receives a boost when outcasts become companions of Christ. Also, Jesus rewards Mary's faithfulness with an exclusive encounter at the resurrection and commission to the fractured community. Who best to carry the message of hope than one who has a history of consistency and first-hand resurrection account? Mary restores and instills resilience in two crisis-ravaged communities - Jesus' and Matthew's – with a hope-filled message about the victory of the Messiah.

### **Interpretation and Synthesis**

Matthew 28:1-10 presents a triumphant Jesus and faithful witnesses. The gospel writer uses an embellished writing style, common among his contemporaries. This style enables him to paint a compelling picture of a community-building hero. Matthew's audience experiences uncertain times and rapid change. In response, Matthew seeks to

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<sup>34</sup> Ricci, *Mary Magdalene*, 133.

<sup>35</sup> Keener, *IVP Bible Background Commentary*, 209.

bring instruction and inspiration to the community through the narrative themes from Jesus' life. Central to that story is the passion and resurrection and the command to communicate it to build the new community. Mary Magdalene and the other women not only witness the life, passion, and resurrection, they become crisis leaders who advance the community.

Eastern tradition, as Allison and Davies reveal, identifies Mary as 'isapostolos' - equal to the apostles.<sup>36</sup> In today's language, Mary helps replant the splintered church after the crucifixion and resurrection. In this role, Mary and her colleagues galvanize the disciples to gather, again, to Jesus. Fearlessly, the women come, see, go, and tell. Later, in Matthew 28:20, the reassembled apostles are commanded to do the same through the great commission. Mary's impact is undeniable.

### **Implications for the Doctoral Project**

COVID-19 sent communities into crisis. Lost lives, fractured faith communities, national unrest, isolation, and mass confusion describe the contents of Matthew's gospel and the context of the community in Galilee. It also characterizes the global context of the current pandemic. The temple, Israel's center of religious life, was destroyed. To some, God's presence was even in question. Now, like then, many are seeking answers in a context where communion is compromised. If the church intends to navigate this pandemic and future crisis successfully, perhaps Mary Magdalene embodies competencies that can help with crisis leadership and community resilience. Like the crisis leaders, Mary Magdalene gathered a fractured community (disciples) after a deadly crisis. Likewise, Mary symbolized hope and resilience to Matthew's fragile

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<sup>36</sup> Davies and Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 637.

community. How did Mary do it? What distinct crisis leadership competencies did Mary display that made her both distinguished and successful? Though this project is still in its early stages, on the surface, Mary's story reveals the following leadership competencies: courage, compassion, commitment to act, conversion, crisis experience, community-focus, creativity, and communication. Mary's actions offer a good starting point. However, an integrative approach is needed to unearth the most critical crisis leadership competency (-ies) that supports community resilience.

### **Summary**

From a literary standpoint, Matthew 28:1-10 encapsulates the life-giving message of the first gospel in the New Testament. Matthew's Jesus is the Messiah and community-builder who triumphantly endures the passion and resurrection. The writer offers this message of restoration, hope, and inspiration to a fraught and fractured community of Jews and Gentiles. His chief witnesses are women – more specifically, Mary Magdalene.

This unlikely hero is acquainted with crisis and a model of resilience. Mary is a constant companion of Jesus and the community in crisis. Her actions during and after the passion and resurrection continue both Jesus' and Matthew's message of community building. In Matthew 28:1-10, Mary receives instruction from the angel and Jesus to come, see, go, and tell. In doing so, Mary succeeds where the disciples fail. As she restores the community and points them to the presence of Jesus in Galilee, she models resilience and crisis leadership.

Mary's context mirrors Matthew's. It is also similar to the current global pandemic-impacted context. Communities in crisis require skilled practitioners and administrators to not only survive but also thrive. As a leader in a religious community, Mary provides a pattern worth examining and duplicating. Developing crisis-competent leaders enables the church to endure trying times, effectively build its community, and complete the great commission. It will also help the global community rebound from the pandemic and build resiliency. Without identifying and developing these competencies, communities and the church are at a greater risk of ineffectiveness and dissolution

## CHAPTER THREE

### HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS

The coronavirus continues to have a wide-reaching global impact. Culturally, it causes seismic social shifts. Economically, organizations, governments, markets, and workers still seek to navigate the new pandemic-recovery norm. Spiritually, communities, congregations, and clergy work to reconcile faith, recovery, and resilience while balancing institutional, communal, and personal needs. Things are slowly normalizing, but they are not the same as before the pandemic. Things may never be the same because epidemics and pandemics produce crises that leave marks on people, markets, and cultures. It is worth noting the current pandemic-shaped context is not unprecedented. This has happened before.

Plagues have ravaged communities for centuries. One of the most notable – the Black Death – occurred during the fourteenth century. While mortality statistics vary, some historians report that half of Europe's population perished during the plague.<sup>1</sup> The devastation lingered for years after the first wave began to wane in 1351. Ultimately, it took years for those civilizations in crisis to recover.

Religious leaders and churches operate in contexts. Those contexts contain cultural, economic, and spiritual dimensions. Since the coronavirus continues to impact this contemporary context, it is important for the church to understand this

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<sup>1</sup> Horrox, Rosemary, trans. *The Black Death*. Manchester Medieval Sources Series, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994), 3.

pandemic better, as well as the ones that preceded it, like the Black Death. Because the coronavirus – Black Death comparisons are uncanny, conceivably, understanding the fourteenth-century plague's cause, impact, and response can prepare the church now to respond, recover, and prepare for the next pandemic.

Sir Gavin de Beer once said, "...science is the collection of nature's answers, (and) the humanities the collection of men's thoughts."<sup>2</sup> Both science and the humanities will help guide this comparison of the impact of the Black Death in the fourteenth century to the coronavirus in the current context of this Doctor of Ministry project. Moreover, this foundation will explore the origins, medical, cultural, and spiritual aspects of the Black Death's impact on Europe.

As previously mentioned, church leaders must familiarize themselves with history to survive and thrive during this pandemic-recovery period and prepare for the next. This exposure helps the church to lead with understanding and practical solutions based on past experiences. Examining the context and ecclesial response to the Black Death provides vital insight into the challenges and adaptations that ensured continuity, recovery, and resilience during a crisis.

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<sup>2</sup> Todayinsci.com, "Sir Gavin De Beer Quotes - 3 Science Quotes - Dictionary of Science Quotations and Scientist Quotes," Todayinsci, [https://todayinsci.com/D/DeBeer\\_Gavin/DeBeerGavin-Quotations.htm](https://todayinsci.com/D/DeBeer_Gavin/DeBeerGavin-Quotations.htm).

## Origins

Pandemics are new diseases or strands that impact multiple countries. Typically, they are highly contagious and result in large numbers of death.<sup>3</sup> Also, most pandemics are zoonotic, which means germs move from animals to humans.<sup>4</sup> According to microbiologists Piret and Boivin, there are over fifteen known pandemics and epidemics in history. These crises include plagues, cholera, influenzas, and respiratory syndrome coronaviruses.

As mentioned, the similarities between the coronavirus and the Black Death are striking. The Black Death devastated the East and Europe. Likewise, the coronavirus touches every continent. This warrants a closer look at the origin, transmission, manifestations, and impact of the Black Death in the fourteenth century. Later, this foundation will pivot and compare it to the coronavirus.

### *Beginnings*

Historians traced the Black Death's spread from 1347-1351 in Europe to trade ships from the East that docked in European seaports. Some in Europe had heard about a plague ravaging the East but were unaware of its lethality and proximity. Unbeknownst to the dockworkers and the town citizens, the disease was a castaway on the ships. When the townspeople greeted the ship, they discovered the dead and dying.

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<sup>3</sup> Jocelyne Piret and Guy Boivin, "Pandemics Throughout History," *Frontiers in Microbiology* 11 (January 15, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmicb.2020.631736>.

<sup>4</sup> Piret and Boivin, "Pandemics Throughout History," <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmicb.2020.631736>.

By the time the residents recognized the problem, it was too late. They were infected and destined to become corpses, casualties, and carriers.<sup>5</sup>

Historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Barbara Tuchman, in *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous Fourteenth Century*, highlights the widespread impact of the plague in and beyond Europe. According to Tuchman, the plague claimed the lives of one-third of the population between India and Iceland.<sup>6</sup>

### *Witnesses*

Dr. Rosemary Horrox, an English historian specializing in the medieval period, captures the sentiments of the times in *The Black Death (Manchester Medieval Sources)*. In it, she translates the works of those who lived and died during the pandemic. These perspectives offer a more accurate picture from that period. The translated accounts touch on the Black Plague's social, cultural, and spiritual impact in Europe.

When highlighting the plague's arrival, Horrox translates the account of a lawyer from Piacenza named Gabriele de Mussis.<sup>7</sup> Mussis, in a summary that spans apocalypse, epiphany, anthropology, and etiology, recounts the plague's introduction to Europe on ships from the East. The plague, which had already troubled other regions, instantly wreaked havoc and killed millions in Europe. Mussi writes:

In 1346, in the countries of the East, countless numbers of Tartars (Russia) and Saracens (Arabian peninsula areas) were struck by a mysterious illness that was brought to Christian areas...When the sailors reached these places and mixed with the people there it was as if they brought evil spirits with them: every city,

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<sup>5</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, first ed. (New York, NY: Knopf, 1978), xiii.

<sup>7</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 14.



every settlement, every place was poisoned by the contagious pestilence, and their inhabitants, both men and women died suddenly. And when one person had contracted the illness, he poisoned his whole family even as they fell and died, so that those preparing to bury his body was seized by death the same way. Thus death entered the windows, and as cities and towns were depopulated their inhabitants mourned their dead neighbors. Speak, Genoa (Italy), what have you done..."<sup>8</sup>

Horrox translates more accounts that all communicate similar sentiments. Each stresses the fact that the plague was a catastrophe that altered Europe's cultural, spiritual, and economic landscape in the fourteenth century. After its initial wave from 1347-1352, the plague continued to return.<sup>9</sup>

The Black Death produced casualties and fatalities and left mourners reeling from witnessing the significant loss of life, safety, and normalcy. The devastation was so widespread some contemporaries testified there were 400 daily deaths, 7,000 abandoned homes, and 11,000 unburied corpses in just one area. When space for mass graves was exhausted, bodies were thrown into the Rhone River.<sup>10</sup> Like the coronavirus, the mysterious yet lethal disease had permanently changed lives, communities, and cultures.

Some believe the Black Death originated with fleas and rodents and later transferred to humans. According to one account, infected dead bodies were weaponized during wars in the East to infect fortified cities. As a result, the plague destroyed entire communities and weakened armies.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Gabriele de Mussis, In *The Black Death*, Manchester Medieval Sources Series, trans by Rosemary Horrox, (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 1994), 17-19.

<sup>9</sup> Monica Green, "Editor's Introduction To Pandemic Disease In The Medieval World: Rethinking The Black Death," In *Pandemic Disease In The Medieval World: Rethinking The Black Death*, Edited By Monica H. Green, (Amsterdam, Netherlands Arc Humanities Press, 2015), 14.

<sup>10</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, first ed. (New York, NY: Knopf, 1978), 94.

<sup>11</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 17.

### *Variations*

Those who survived or fled were unaware they became carriers of one of three variations of the plague. The Black Death is the bubonic, pneumonic, and septicemic plague. Infection-filled blisters characterized the bubonic plague. Touching them spread the plague. However, the pneumonic plague infected the airway and spread airborne. With it, unbeknownst to the community, casual conversations produced casualties. The septicemic variation involved infection of the blood and circulatory system. It resulted in shock, organ failure, and other signs and internal symptoms. Though each had distinct modes of transmission, they shared origins and outcomes – very contagious, severe sickness, and a high mortality rate. Social distancing, inferior science, and mystical measures were common prevention and intervention methods.<sup>12</sup>

### **Cultural Impact**

Culture is a way of life. It includes origins, people, places, language, values, religion, laws, arts, and economies. According to author and activist James Baldwin, "...no people come into possession of a culture without paying a heavy price for it. Of course, they cannot assess this price, but it is revealed in their personalities and institutions."<sup>13</sup> Baldwin's quote accurately describes the collision of culture and pandemics. This project now pivots to some cultural, economic, and religious impacts of

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<sup>12</sup> Piret and Boivin, "Pandemics Throughout History," <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmicb.2020.631736>.

<sup>13</sup> James Baldwin, "Equal in Paris an Autobiographical Story," *Commentary Magazine*, <https://www.commentary.org/articles/james-baldwin/equal-in-parisan-autobiographical-story/>.

the Black Death in Europe in the fourteenth century, which this project will later compare to the coronavirus today.

### *Unrest*

During the mid-fourteenth century, classism and conflict were commonplace. Also, the conventional structure of life in Europe revolved around the feudal system.<sup>14</sup> Birthplace, birthrights, and land rights determined one's station in life, and socioeconomic segregation was the norm. The struggle for politics, power, and possessions produced conflict. Unsurprisingly, the latter part of the 100 Years' War also occurred during this time. Barbara Tuchman describes the fourteenth century as a time of great suffering, unrest, and peril, that also contained a plague. She writes that cultural turbulence – "... (famine), war, taxes, brigandage, bad government, insurrection, and schism in the Church" predated the plague and continued afterward.<sup>15</sup>

### *Urbanization*

The agrarian culture was a norm. The land produced sustenance and helped fuel economies. Everyone, from royals to peasants, depended on production. Before the pandemic, Europe experienced a period of plentiful harvests followed by severe lack. This expansion and rapid retraction created an environment marked by food insecurity. Also, leading up to the Black Death, there was a population shift. Population density increased as people began living in walled urban areas instead of the open spaces

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<sup>14</sup> Rodney Hilton, *Class, Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2003), 158.

<sup>15</sup> Tuchman, *Calamitous 14th Century*, xiii.

common to agrarian-centric periods. The concentration impacted the social aspect of the culture, but it also affected hygiene. Consequently, close living conditions and poor hygiene created an environment where disease and sickness could incubate and spread quickly.<sup>16</sup>

### *Devastation*

When the Black Death made its way to that region in the fourteenth century, it wreaked havoc. In a short time, due to the population density, and issues surrounding hygiene and malnutrition, the disease moved quickly through the region. People, already reeling from insecurity, oppression, and class disparities, also had to contend with a mysterious, mass casualty-producing pandemic.<sup>17</sup>

The cultural response varied along class lines. Those with resources retreated from dense areas to the countryside. Many who lacked resources and means of mobility merely sought to survive, care for others, and make sense of the catastrophe. However, everyone in that region experienced loss, upended norms, and unmet needs.

### **Economic Impact**

Inevitably, plagues impact economies. Jim Reid, an asset researcher from Deutsche Bank, suggests that pandemics and economic slowdown are closely linked. Recently, he published a report that found a correlation between prior pandemics and

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<sup>16</sup> Hilton, *Class, Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 158.

<sup>17</sup> Graeme White, *The Medieval English Landscape, 1000-1540*, (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2012), xxvii.

economic retractions. The report also compared the Black Death and coronavirus.<sup>18</sup>

Though slowdown is an expected development during pandemics, positive changes can also occur.

### *Changing Market*

During the fourteenth century, the Black Death further weakened a fragile economy. As mentioned, before the pandemic, Europeans experienced unrest. However, the Black Death impacted the entire economic landscape, from commerce to common laws. During the pandemic, supply, labor, wages, inflation, and work arrangements all changed.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise, before the pandemic, food scarcity persisted. From an economic perspective, this warrants a closer look. Changes in weather patterns and population density impacted the food supply. Many died during the pandemic, including landowners and commoners who worked the land. What had been a booming agricultural epicenter decades prior was now untended. This worsened the supply chain and rocked the economy.<sup>20</sup>

Also, as the pandemic raged on, there were labor shortages. Death claimed the lives of many. However, that only accounts for part of the story. Those who survived the

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<sup>18</sup> Jamie Powell, "Coronavirus and Historical Contractions," Financial Times, April 1, 2020, <https://www.ft.com/content/b592fb36-1048-4d61-85a7-2eceb889f11d>.

<sup>19</sup> Hilton, *Class, Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 158.

<sup>20</sup> Hilton, 158.

plague were now in high demand for previously limited roles. In short, farm labor was limited, and output suffered.<sup>21</sup>

Labor shortages led to wage inflation. Those who previously counted themselves privileged to work in the feudal and manorial system now found themselves in a stronger position to negotiate pay and profit sharing. Those in power struggled to accept the new norm.

### *Changing Laws*

As a result, nobles and landowners responded by instituting commerce and culture-controlling rules. Some laws targeted pay freezes and mobility restrictions. Other laws focused on re-establishing class lines. These were called sumptuary laws. The affluent and powerful packaged the laws as a moral necessity to curb extravagance. However, the real motive was classism. It offended the sensibilities of the well-heeled and bourgeois that peasants and commoners could now afford some of the same dress, food, and possessions.<sup>22</sup> However, the laws were not as effective as hoped. The stations of peasants, landowners, and lords were changing.

### *Changing Community*

The ripple effects of the pandemic not only impacted relations between landowners and peasants. Peter Larson writes about intra-community strife in north England in *Agriculture and Rural Society after the Black Death: Common Themes and*

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<sup>21</sup> Hilton, 158.

<sup>22</sup> Katherine French, *The Good Women of the Parish: Gender and Religion After the Black Death*. (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt3fhmtr>.

*Regional Variations.* Larson points to a fraying sense of community in Durham after the Black Death. As the peasantry came to grips with the new normal after the pandemic, "...social dynamics, attitudes, and mentalities..." gave way to community discord related to livestock, trespass, malingering, insolence, crime, and destruction.<sup>23</sup>

### *Changing for Good*

In some ways, the pandemic produced positive outcomes. Wages increased, and working conditions improved for some survivors. The landowners needed labor, governments needed replacement residents, and the demand for skilled farmers to produce commodities created a seismic shift. Years later, from a cultural and economic standpoint, feudalism eventually faded.<sup>24</sup>

## **Religious Impact**

Lauren Fleshman, two-time NCAA Track and Field champion, is credited with saying, "Perfect preparation does not exist. Excellent adaptation does."<sup>25</sup> Who is genuinely ready to master a pandemic? Perhaps the goal is not to master a pandemic as much as to prevent or minimize its impact. Considering this, no institution can be perfectly ready for a pandemic. However, organizations must adapt to a crisis. Especially the church.

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<sup>23</sup> Peter L. Larson, "Rural Transformation in Northern England: Village Communities of Durham," in Dodds, Ben, and R. H. Britnell, *Agriculture and Rural Society After the Black Death: Common Themes and Regional Variations*; Studies in Regional and Local History, volume. 6. (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008), 205-207.

<sup>24</sup> Hilton, *Class, Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism*, 158.

<sup>25</sup> Lauren Fleshman, *Believe Training Journal*, (Boulder, CO: VeloPress, 2015), 142.

The fourteenth century was a context laden with significant challenges for the church. It was a period of internal and external unrest, compounded by a deadly and disruptive pandemic. Despite the challenges, the church survived. What follows is a look at the church's challenges in the fourteenth century. This section considers three categories – institutional, social, and spiritual challenges.

### *Institutional*

During the fourteenth century, the church (Catholic church) was central to religious life in Europe. Its impact was far-reaching and influenced both princes and peasants. Institutionally, the church's power was typically concentrated in Rome. However, a Pope from France was selected during the early fourteenth century. Rather than permanently relocating to Rome, he moved the seat of power to Avignon, France. This worsened relations and intensified factionalism in the church. This period was known as the Avignon Papacy, and it lasted from 1309-1377 during the first and subsequent waves of the Black Death.<sup>26</sup> In the darkest time of the fourteenth century, the institution of the church was experiencing internal challenges.

In addition to internal challenges, the church struggled politically and financially. The church always played a role in politics. The plague just added another layer. Initially, the church had a greater influence in selecting bishops. Later, some rulers were more openly exerting their power over selections and control of the incumbents. Hence, during the period of the Black Death, some bishops fell sway to secular leadership more so than spiritual orders. As a result, secular leaders dictated homilies and required more "taxes"

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<sup>26</sup> Michael Ray, "Avignon Papacy," Encyclopedia Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Avignon-papacy>.



from church treasuries. Initially, church leaders resisted the demands, especially during the pandemic when everyone struggled with scarcity. However, church leaders in the region later capitulated.<sup>27</sup>

Also, the church had a quantity and quality issue with its clergy. Religious leaders perished in large numbers during the plague, death depleted the church's ranks and diminished its capability. The situation was so overwhelming clergy could not meet the demand for confession and last rites. John Kelly, in *The Great Mortality*, suggests the death rate among the clergy was much higher than the already alarming rate of the overall population.<sup>28</sup> In response, one bishop allowed communities to hold confession with one another outside the confines of the church.

In addition to quantity, the church struggled with quality leadership in some areas. William Langland, a fourteenth-century chronicler, describes the poor state of the church in a poem. He writes:

Suburban parsons and priests complained to the bishops  
that since the plague, their parishes have grown poor,  
looking for license and leave to live in London,  
and sing there in simony, for silver sounds sweet...  
I saw bishops and divinity school students  
taking treasury positions in the king's administration.  
I saw deacons and deans, who are supposed  
to preach to the people and to feed the poor,  
eloping instead to London,  
with the Bishop's blessing.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> William Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: The Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 63-69.

<sup>28</sup> John Kelly, *The Great Mortality: An Intimate History of the Black Death, the Most Devastating Plague of All Time*, (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 2005), 294.

<sup>29</sup> William Langland, *Piers Plowman (1300s): The A Version*, Translated by Michael A Calabrese, (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2020), 8.

Amid the hour of greatest need, the church was short on personnel and passion and battling institutional challenges. The demand for committed, ordained, and lay leaders was great.<sup>30</sup>

### *Social*

More so than other times, the church and religion filled a void during suffering. Some people converted to Christianity, assuming it would spare them from suffering. However, they discovered Christians were also suffering through the Black Death.<sup>31</sup> Also, congregating became a life-or-death decision. Temporarily, parishes suspended services.<sup>32</sup> Likewise, as previously mentioned, the church could not meet the overwhelming demand for last rights and proper burials. Consequently, when people had unmet needs and unanswered questions, the church, as a sacred and social space, was unable to fully support them. Eventually, the church embraced adaptive practices to offer some sustainment and support for the suffering and seeking.

### *Spiritual Challenges*

Debate and dissent on theology, doctrine, practice, and polity are commonplace in the church. The same is true for the period surrounding the Black Death. Because it is impossible to treat every religious perspective from the period, what follows is a snapshot of religious developments during the period.

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<sup>30</sup> Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, 63-69.

<sup>31</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 66.

<sup>32</sup> Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, 63-69

### *Sacraments*

Though unprepared for the pandemic, the church leaned on the sacraments, practices, and statements as guideposts.<sup>33</sup> Church leaders sought to continue service and sacraments as sources of strength. Pope Clement VI endorsed flexibility in sacrament administration. He even went so far as to grant remission of sin to all who perished from the pandemic because clergy could not meet the demand to provide lead confession or administer last rites.<sup>34</sup> Interestingly, while the pandemic raged, the sacraments were also a point of debate and dissent.

John Wycliffe protested and pushed reforms decades before the Reformation. He challenged the Catholic church on several practices, including its theology surrounding transubstantiation and the Eucharist. To Wycliffe and the Alexians and Lollards (whom he inspired), Jesus was present in the sacraments, but the sacraments did not transform into his body and blood.<sup>35</sup> This put Wycliffe and his followers at odds with the church, and later, he was labeled a heretic by the Catholic church.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Robert S. Gottfried, *The Black Death: Natural and Human Disaster in Medieval Europe* (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1983), 84.

<sup>34</sup> Barbara W. Tuchman, *A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century*, 95

<sup>35</sup> John Wycliffe, *Triologus (1348)*, Translated by Stephen E Lahey, (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 201.

<sup>36</sup> Fiona Somerset, *Feeling Like Saints: Lollard Writings After Wyclif* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014), 2.

### *Service*

The debate over observing the sacrificial death of Christ lingered at a curious time when people were reeling from the effects of the Black Death and in need of help. While the substitutionary nature of the elements was debated, the sacrificial model of the Savior was not. During the period of the Black Death, the Lollards cared for the outcast, infected, and expired. Despite their good works, the Catholic church did not endorse the group because they were critical of veneration of images, pilgrimages, candle lighting, holy water, and transubstantiation.<sup>37</sup>

Nevertheless, Lollards were the hands of Jesus to those who were sick, suffering, and spiritless. While others retreated to safer stations to wait out the pandemic, the Lollards (which connotes soft singing or chanting) funeralized and buried the dead that both family and officials had abandoned.<sup>38</sup> This added a different dimension to the debate about the presence of Christ in the sacraments and caused some to criticize the church for being out of step with those who were in the trenches doing ministry.<sup>39</sup>

### *Fanaticism*

Some religious leaders engaged in self-flogging as personal penance during the pandemic. The movement gained steam in some areas because the flagellants were passionate about the practice and dogmatic approach. Their fanaticism proved quite

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<sup>37</sup> Langland, *Piers Plowman* (1300s), xxi.

<sup>38</sup> Francis Urquhart, "Lollards," in *The Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York, NY: Robert Appleton Company, 1910).

<sup>39</sup> As an aside, perhaps, given the significance of the mission of the Lollards to the broken during the plague, it was a reminder that regardless of whether Jesus is physically in the elements or the elements become Jesus's body, every servant can be like Jesus and care for the sick, suffering, and spiritless. Those models and meanings could not be lost on a community looking to religion for answers.

persuasive during a period of desperation and answer-seeking. Also, they were agitators of the institutional church and clergy – to the point of forcefully taking over some churches – who became idolized antiheroes to some. This forced Pope Clement VI to condemn both the practice and its leaders. The movement was suppressed, but the practice of flagellation continued.<sup>40</sup>

### *Violence*

Other religious solutions centered on attacking and sacrificing others. During the pandemic, there was widespread violence against Jews in the European region. As the plague spread westward along routes and roads, so did massacres. Jewish residents and neighbors were accused of poisoning wells during the volatile, uncertain, and ambiguous time surrounding the plague. Others accused them of inviting the curse of God on the land, thereby causing the wrath of God to be poured on those around them. According to one source in Iberia, the worst plague-linked violence was reserved for the Jewish population.<sup>41</sup> In a translated observer's account from the fourteenth century, Heinrich Truchess von Diessenhoven writes, "Within one year...all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt."<sup>42</sup> Similar atrocities were reported across southern Europe, where the path of the spreading plague and violence were identical.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> William Cooper, *Flagellation and the Flagellants: A History of the Rod* (Amsterdam, Netherlands: Fredonia Books, 2001), 108.

<sup>41</sup> Susan Einbinder, "Bones and Poems: Perpetrators and Victims," in *After the Black Death: Plague and Commemoration Among Iberian Jews* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018), <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv16t6dcz.8.118>.

<sup>42</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, 275.

<sup>43</sup> Einbinder, *Perpetrators and Victims*, 119.

The unfounded accusations and evil acts against the innocent Jewish population eventually prompted a response from the Pope. According to some historians, the Pope published two papal bulls, that protected Jewish people, and condemned those who wanted to destroy them. This need for protection continued after the first wave of the Black Death. Each subsequent plague outbreak brought anti-Jewish sentiments, prompting petitions for protection.<sup>44</sup>

### *Suffering Saint*

Some writers also suggest the period of the Black Death gave rise to a fixation on the passion of Christ and point to the increase in poetry, writings, and art from the fourteenth century centered on suffering.<sup>45</sup> Perhaps the goal was to equate pandemic-related suffering to sanctification.

On the bright side, the context of the crisis also produced innovation. Pope Clement VI, who stayed in Avignon, France, instead of Rome, introduced reforms and initiatives to help the church.<sup>46</sup> He also challenged heretics and the violent who harmed and took advantage of the vulnerability of others. Likewise, Bishops, seeking to fill clergy and lay leadership roles, instituted changes to accelerate new ordinations and appointments. This steady-handed yet agile spiritual leadership, like that of Pope Clement VI and Bishop Trillek at the Diocese of Hereford, provided the stability and accountability necessary during this critical period to meet the spiritual needs of suffering

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<sup>44</sup> Einbinder, 123.

<sup>45</sup> New Advent, "Catholic Encyclopedia: Pope Clement VI," Newadvent.org, <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/04023a.htm> and <https://www.newadvent.org/cathen/06089c.htm>.

<sup>46</sup> Ray, "Avignon Papacy," Britannica, <https://www.britannica.com/event/Avignon-papacy>.

people, and continue the operations, resilience, and recovery of the church. Spiritual leadership, resolve, and innovation helped the church adapt.<sup>47</sup>

### **Comparative Consideration**

As mentioned earlier, the parallels between the Black Death and the coronavirus are uncanny. Now, this foundation will compare the origins, medical, cultural, and religious developments during the Black Death and coronavirus.

#### *Medical*

Like the Black Death, epidemiologists suggest the zoonotic coronavirus originated in the East. Specifically, they believe the coronavirus came from wet markets in Wuhan, China.<sup>48</sup> Finally, like the Black Death, the disease is transmitted through air and touch, and both pandemics caused millions of deaths and infections.

#### *Culture*

Like the fourteenth century, the lethality of the pandemic came as a shock and impacted everything. Uncertainty and unrest best describe 2020. From the capital in Washington, D.C., to the streets of major cities, a constant stream of concerning news flooded the airwaves. When the pandemic hit, churches closed; businesses shuttered; unemployment grew; food scarcity worsened; governments struggled to prop up economies, and daily routines came to a screeching halt. Medical systems and workers

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<sup>47</sup> Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership*, 63-69.

<sup>48</sup> Piret and Boivin, "Pandemics Throughout History." *Frontiers in Microbiology*. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fmicb.2020.631736>.

were overwhelmed, and quarantine restrictions weighed heavily on isolated families and communities. Likewise, food insecurity created challenges. Slowed supply chains and limited stock forced grocery stores to limit purchases.

On a positive note, support and innovation soared during the pandemic as communities rallied to support small businesses and community members. In some instances, unity replaced tensions. One author noted that even protestors were more diverse during the pandemic.<sup>49</sup> Also, customers and businesses adapted to the environment.

### *Economic*

Like the Black Death, the coronavirus produced a domino effect that sent waves through the economy. As noted, in 2020 and 2021, supply and demand challenges persisted and inflation spiked.<sup>50</sup>

Also, there was a labor shortage. In August 2021, the United States had the highest number of job openings in history. Like the period of the Black Death, laws were put in place to address economic concerns. However, some governors ended enhanced unemployment benefits and restricted social programs to drive workers into the labor market.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Dana Fisher, “The Diversity of the Recent Black Lives Matter Protests is a Good Sign for Racial Equity,” Brookings, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/how-we-rise/2020/07/08/the-diversity-of-the-recent-black-lives-matter-protests-is-a-good-sign-for-racial-equity/>.

<sup>50</sup> Patti Domm, “Labor Shortage, Supply Constraints and Inflation Hold Back Economy Trying to Emerge from Pandemic,” CNBC, <https://www.cnbc.com/2021/10/29/labor-shortage-supply-constraints-and-inflation-hold-back-economy-trying-to-emerge-from-pandemic.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Cambon and Dougherty, “States That Cut Unemployment Benefits,” WSJ, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/states-that-cut-unemployment-benefits-saw-limited-impact-on-job-growth-11630488601>.



The coronavirus, like its comparative pandemic, produced some positive changes. Wages, quality of life programs, and the employee experience improved. Likewise, adaptability and innovation soared during the pandemic. According to Forbes, multiple hosting, streaming, and services providers saw increased profits.<sup>52</sup> The church also benefited from these innovations.

### *Church*

During the coronavirus pandemic, the church experienced similar issues as the Catholic church in the fourteenth century. The pandemic created a context that pressed against the church's door and touched everything from the pulpit to the pew.

Since its inception, unlike other communities, the Black church has always carried a multifaceted charge – live for Jesus Christ and strive for freedom and equality. National unrest and the pandemic again laid bare the importance of this mission.<sup>53</sup> Inequality was not just a pain point for peasants in the fourteenth century; it was apparent during the coronavirus pandemic. Strife related to police brutality, systemic racism, and the presidential election revealed a continuing rift between some White evangelicals and some in the Black church. While political and social fault lines previously existed, protests and calls for change further revealed a politicized and polarized American church.<sup>54</sup> Likening this rift to the Avignon papacy of the fourteenth century is a stretch.

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<sup>52</sup> Forbes, “Council Post: 14 Pandemic-Driven Tech Innovations That Will Continue to Impact the World,” Forbes, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbestechcouncil/2021/06/04/14-pandemic-driven-tech-innovations-that-will-continue-to-impact-the-world/?sh=262b531b6a23>.

<sup>53</sup> Stephanie C. Boddie and Jerry Z. Park, “Racializing the Religious During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” *Religions* 12, no. 5 (May 12, 2021): 341, <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12050341>.

<sup>54</sup> Boddie and Park, “Racializing the Religious During the COVID-19 Pandemic,” 341.

However, it is hard to classify western Christianity as a unified institution on race matters.

### *Economics*

During the pandemic, the church also experienced economic challenges. When the economy retracts, so does charitable giving. Churches that failed to embrace electronic giving missed financial opportunities. Also, government stimulus programs designed to assist struggling organizations were inaccessible to some churches.<sup>55</sup>

### *Social*

Like the fourteenth century, the church's social impact was hampered. Government restrictions limited attendance or suspended services. Because the church is a social institution, this compromised a key feature of congregational life. Fortunately, other worship options – like streaming and outdoor worship – presented suitable alternatives.

### *Spiritual*

Although pandemic restrictions required churches to close in many states, Texas was more lenient. This provided churches the flexibility to deliver spiritual support to the community. Some churches elected online services as a preventive measure, while others decided to continue gathering. Unfortunately, for some, gathering had more to do with

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<sup>55</sup> Boddie and Park.

politics than religion. Likewise, in some spaces, medical mandates produced politicized theology.<sup>56</sup>

However, like the period of the Black Death, innovation soared. Some congregations shifted to open-air worship or drive-in services. Also, churches streamed services and Christian education. In many ways, this improved congregation connectivity and communication during the crisis.<sup>57</sup> Likewise, electronic giving became a financial lifeline for houses of worship. Research indicates that churches that adapted to conditions and adopted technology increased member satisfaction.

The story of the impact of the coronavirus on the church is still being written. It will be years before the pandemic's full effect is apparent. Though the coronavirus presented challenges, adapting and innovating enabled some churches to survive and thrive.

### **Summary**

The similarities between the coronavirus and the Black Death are noteworthy. From origins to impact, both pandemics shook society during their respective periods. They created contexts that greatly challenged countries, citizens, cultures, commerce, and churches.

Both pandemics were deadly and disruptive. Though the Black Death led to millions of deaths in Europe, it showed the church must adapt and innovate to survive.

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<sup>56</sup> Boddie and Park, 341.

<sup>57</sup> Scott McConnell, "The Encouraging State of the Post-COVID Church," Lifeway Research, <https://lifewayresearch.com/2021/06/18/the-encouraging-state-of-the-post-covid-church/>.

During that period of crisis, institutional, social, and spiritual functions pivoted to practicality to meet the needs of parishioners and ensure the church continued operations.

Political and social unrest marked the period of the Black Death. Again, the church was pulled into politics and shaped by secular causes. Likewise, the pandemic laid bare inequalities, systemic, and socio-economic challenges.

As catastrophic as pandemics can be, they produced some positive outcomes. Community connectivity increased; barriers to religious participation were removed; church support increased; and the church moved beyond the walls. Technological differences aside, improvements during the pandemic of the twenty-first century have twin innovations that occurred during the Black Death in the fourteenth century. In both instances, the church bent, but it did not break.

Like the period of the Black Death in Europe, during the coronavirus pandemic some churches closed, while others survived. Yet, others thrived. The same can be said about church leaders. It was true centuries ago, and it is still true now, obstacles can birth opportunities. How did some thrive during a pandemic? Perhaps, theological underpinnings or interdisciplinary solutions helped. If that is true, perhaps they can help the church reproduce future resilient leaders and thriving communities.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### THEOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Since 2019, the pandemic has caused a global crisis. The number of infections and lost lives is staggering. The pandemic's impact yet lingers, as institutions, governments, markets, and individuals seek to rebound and journey toward normalcy. Like other institutions, the church and ministries continue to navigate new norms and offer worship and community support. However, not every church has been thriving.

During the pandemic, some churches suspended operations and gatherings, while others pressed forward to provide spiritual support, sanctuary, and stability in their context. Absent restrictions and requirements, why did some leaders fall back when others pressed forward? Why did some churches continue to gather when it was deemed risky? Perhaps the answer is more theological than political or social. I suggest theological underpinnings strengthen spiritual leaders and communities to survive and thrive during crises. If the church gathers as a community during a crisis, then it is best postured to embody and express its sacramental nature identified in Communion Ecclesiology.

#### *Community in Crisis*

Previously, we examined the fourteenth century church's response to the Black Death and Mary Magdalene's reaction to the cross-connected crisis. In both instances, the

church was effective because it emphasized the significance of spiritual communion, even when it was risky.

Metaphorically, COVID-19 landed a seemingly fatal blow on a church already struggling with waning attendance. Tapping into thirty years of research, George Barna and David Kinnaman, in their book *Churchless*, sounded the alarm about church attendance and membership in America. In 1990, seventy percent of Americans registered as churched, meaning they either actively or minimally attend a place of worship. That number dropped to fifty-seven percent in 2014.<sup>1</sup> Prior to the pandemic, church attendance was declining. The pandemic made matters worse.

The Cleft of the Rock Church is a predominately African American church in San Antonio, Texas, which offered a hybrid approach to worship before the pandemic. During the crisis, the church retooled its strategy to continue to meet as a community. Operating as a drive-in church was the safest and most effective way to continue gathering as a community. Tradition, culture, and the importance of community informed the strategy. Surprisingly, attendance and giving increased, which positioned the church perfectly for post-pandemic optimization. Why did the church experience growth during the crisis? How did the church purchase land, renovate buildings, and secure a multi-million-dollar loan on a mixed-use development when the crisis crippled others? The story of innovation and success is not exclusive to Cleft of the Rock Church. Others experienced the same. But why? Perhaps, theology offers some clues.

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<sup>1</sup> David Kinnaman and George Barna, *Churchless: Understanding Today's Unchurched and How to Connect with Them* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale Momentum, 2015), 6.

### *Crisis Requires a Resilient Response*

The church responds best to a crisis when believers gather to experience the mystery of the Godhead through rituals, relationships, and renewal. During the crisis, some church leaders and ministries embraced innovation and alternative solutions to gather safely. Many shifted to technology. While digital delivery and the virtual environment filled needs, are they a suitable long-term alternative to physical church attendance?

As noted, Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection created a crisis for his followers in Matthew chapters twenty-seven and twenty-eight. Mary Magdalene is sent to witness to the quarantined community of disciples, and gathered them (collect, assemble) to see Jesus (perceive, gaze, and meet) in Galilee (Matt. 28:1-7). As "an apostle to the apostle" and crisis leader, Mary's faithfulness unifies the community, builds resilience, and witnesses to the world – both then and now.

The command to gather and witness is repeated throughout the New Testament. For instance, the writer of Hebrews issues similar guidance to God's people. It reads: "Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near" (Heb. 10:25 NRSV). Here, we find three noteworthy things. First, the writer uses the transliterated Greek word *episunagógé*. This word means "collecting" and "putting the parts together."<sup>2</sup> Imagine a bike or puzzle. It requires parts that perfectly fit to be whole. Second, the writer presses the importance of togetherness. Third, the writer identifies the communal and personal benefit of the fellowship – encouragement and endurance. The passage appears to

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<sup>2</sup> Bible Hub, "Strong's Greek: 1997, ἐπισυναγωγή (Episunagógé)," biblehub.com, <https://biblehub.com/greek/1997.htm>.

indicate that abandonment and absenteeism are risky, ineffective, and inadvisable. On the other hand, being present regularly projects praise and worship (13:13), compassion and sharing (13:3), hospitality (13:1-2), and peace (12:4).<sup>3</sup> In the first century and today, gathering as a body of believers is essential.

This triggers a few questions regarding the current crisis. What does it mean for the church to meet? Also, how can one meet when time, distance, incapacity, location, law, or crisis prohibit it? In other words, how can the church be the church when the church cannot (or should not) physically meet? Are there valid exceptions during exigencies?

### **Method and Focus**

What follows is a theological exploration of ecclesiology, also known as the doctrine of the church. This research examines the church by considering history, scripture, theology, and tradition. Given the current pandemic, the primary focus of this investigation centers on contemporary ecclesiology thought – specifically, Communion Ecclesiology. Moreover, consistent with the current context, much consideration will also be given to the Black church in America.

If the church cannot physically gather, I contend that members can use alternative means to experience worship. However, those means fail to keep fidelity with historical thought and contemporary principles and benefits of Communion Ecclesiology. Barring exigencies, emergencies, or incapacities, when the church fails to gather physically, it deprives the church and community of God's means of grace, which is conveyed in the

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<sup>3</sup> Fred B. Craddock, "The Letter to the Hebrews," *The New Interpreter's Bible New Testament Survey*, ed. Leander E. Keck (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005), 293.



transformational communal encounter with the essential and economic Trinity. Simply put, the church must gather. If not, the spiritual and contextual community will suffer or die. Though virtual worship will be considered later, this chapter will not fully explore every aspect of digital delivery of worship. However, this chapter will explore it in the context of Communion Ecclesiology.

### **Ecclesiology Defined**

According to Theologian Charles C. Ryrie, Systematic Theology offers a structured, ordered, and cohesive review of God's revealed truth – historical, biblical, and progressive.<sup>4</sup> Ecclesiology is a subset of Systematic Theology that focuses on the church. It seeks to define perspectives, precepts, principles, practices, and people involved in the church. Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, in *Introduction to Theology* highlight the importance of ecclesiology with this statement: “The doctrine of the church is central to the curriculum of theological education since it is the fulcrum and the transition between the biblical, historical, and systematic studies and the practical disciplines.”<sup>5</sup> In other words, ecclesiology is the linchpin between Systematic and Practical Theology and the nexus of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. Its import cannot be overstated.

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<sup>4</sup> Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *Basic Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1986), 14-15.

<sup>5</sup> Owen C. Thomas and Ellen K. Wondra, *Introduction to Theology* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 2002), 257.

*Ecclesiology: History, Terms, and Thoughts*

Theologian James H. Evans suggests most theologians link the church's birth to one of three events in the Bible: 1) God's covenant with Israel in multiple Old Testament passages, 2) Peter's confession in Matt. 16:13-18, and 3) The day of Pentecost in Acts 2.<sup>6</sup>

Thomas and Wondra wrote that the New Testament church emerges after the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the coming of the Holy Spirit. These events establish the community called the church.<sup>7</sup> While these theologians believe in a historical, event-based genesis of the church community, nothing in their doctrine indicates post-partum infertility when it comes to renewal, new churches, and fresh expressions.

The form and function of the church are linked to several scriptures. A few are listed below.<sup>8</sup>

1. Acts 19:39, 41 (a non-religious assembly).
2. Acts 7:38 (Israel as an assembly).
3. Eph. 1:22-23 (church, the body of Christ).
4. Ro. 16:5 (church in a house).
5. 1 Cor. 1:2 (church in a city).
6. Acts 9:31 (church in a region).
7. 1 Tim. 3:1-13 (qualifications of elders of the church)
8. Acts 2:42 and 1 Cor. 12-14 (activities of the church)

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<sup>6</sup> James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 134.

<sup>7</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 258.

<sup>8</sup> Ryrie, *Basic Theology*, 529.

Historically and traditionally, several words and images are used to identify and define the church. Terms like *ecclesia*, *ekklesia*, *koinonia*, and communion. Both *ecclesia* (Latin) and *ekklesia* (Greek) convey the concept of being “called out” “or singled out.”<sup>9</sup> The connotation is both positive and special. *Koinonia* (Greek) points to common fellowship, partnership, relationship, sharing, intimacy, and community. Like *koinonia*, communion has multiple synonyms. In context, whether gathering, intimacy, fellowship, or sacrament, it appears to note a sense of mutually beneficial unity.<sup>10</sup> However, it is essential to note that a gathered community is not automatically holy and sacramental. It requires something (or someone) special to be sacred.

According to one writer, the New Testament presents over 100 images of the church.<sup>11</sup> Notice that each name and image denote interconnectivity and unity, suggesting relationships or ownership. A few key ones are listed below.

1. The congregation of the faithful.
2. The body of Christ.
3. The faithful of the Spirit.
4. The community of hope.
5. The bride of Christ

The Apostle Paul introduces or expounds on most of the metaphors above. Paul’s favorite description of the church is the body of Christ. For Paul, the church is the church

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<sup>9</sup> Marita Winters, “Communion Ecclesiology and Communication in the Post-Vatican II Church,” (MPhil thesis, University of Notre Dame Australia, 2017), 5, <https://researchonline.nd.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1177&context=theses>.

<sup>10</sup> Bible Hub, “Strong’s Greek: 2842. *κοινωνία* (Koinónia),” biblehub.com, 2021, <https://biblehub.com/greek/2842.htm>.

<sup>11</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 258.

because the Spirit of God constitutes the gathered community of the body of Jesus Christ. The Spirit gifts believers (individual parts) for the benefit of the body.<sup>12</sup> As one theologian notes, it is impossible to talk about the body of Christ without the Spirit because every human body has a spirit. Just as we are spirits in a body, the church is not a body without a Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

Like Paul, theologians, philosophers, and leaders define the church. Individually, they provide a snapshot of their personal systematic theologies. Collectively, they contribute patchwork to the quilt of ecclesiology. According to Thomas and Wondra, when it comes to the church:

- Montanists championed spirit over institution and leadership.
- Cyprian values unity, relationships with bishops, and the institutional church.
- Donatists gather with saints, and ministerial holiness impacts the sacraments.
- Augustine speaks of a sacramental, spiritual, mystical body of saints and sinners.
- Reformers see a visible and invisible church. Word, faith, and sacraments are exalted.
- Anabaptists argue the church is exclusively for regenerates and true believers.
- Rudolf Bultmann suggests it is an event that includes preaching, hearing, and obedience.
- John Branner believes it is a structured community that is superior to structure.
- Lesslie Newbigin calls it a visible, local community with actual names and addresses.<sup>14</sup>

Coherence and conflict are common in theology. Ecclesiology is no different.

While Thomas and Wondra suggest views on the foundation, form, and function of the church are not too far-flung, they also indicate ideas are fluid. They suggest the twentieth-century church has undergone three movements that help shape contemporary

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<sup>12</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 258-259.

<sup>13</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2002), 269.

<sup>14</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 261-268.

ecclesiology – institution, spiritual body, and mission.<sup>15</sup> These movements present a church that repeatedly experiences renewal. In summation, Thomas and Wondra believe the church is a community of hope moving in hope. This indicates that the church and its members, operating in a present fragmented unity, are not what they should be or will be.<sup>16</sup> The church yet looks and leans forward in the hope of glory, despite imperfections in its current construct, character, and context.

### **Communion Ecclesiology**

From a biblical, historical, and traditional perspective, in-person church attendance (gathering) is assumed pseudo-sacramental and kerygmatic. These beliefs help form the foundation of Communion Ecclesiology or the Ecclesiology of Communion, which is the focus of this project's theological foundation.

Communion Ecclesiology suggests that gathered saints are more than attendees and audience. While gathering typically involves preaching, praying, worshipping, and singing, Communion Ecclesiology points to a far more significant phenomenon. The Godhead embodies, enchants, empowers, and emanates when the church gathers. As noted earlier in the discussion on New Testament Greek, not all gatherings are sacred. Communion Ecclesiology proposes that the embodied meeting of the church, founded by Jesus Christ and filled with the Holy Spirit, is a sacrament that conveys grace and communicates the good news. Before further exploring Communion Ecclesiology, it is important to discuss the sacraments. Knowing the sacraments is critical to understanding this ecclesiology. The church's rituals and practices include sacraments and ordinances.

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas and Wondra, 262, 263.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas and Wondra, 270-272.

Though they appear in Systematic Theology and other disciplines, they are separate fields of study. Given their level of importance, they are briefly discussed next.

Sacramental Theology comes primarily from Catholic origins. Vatican II is responsible for the current theology of sacraments. The word sacrament conveys sacred mystery. Sacraments are a visible and invisible reality that are means of God's grace. In other words, to Catholics, they are not simply symbols of grace. They convey grace. The Catholic community has seven sacraments covering the three major areas: initiation, healing, and service. The seven sacraments are baptism, confirmation, eucharist, penance, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, matrimony, and holy orders.<sup>17</sup>

Conversely, Ordinance Theology is associated with the Reformation. The word ordinance denotes requirement, law, and obedience. While the Catholic church has several sacraments, two are embraced by Reformers and subsequent Protestant denominations – baptism and the Lord's supper (also called communion). Though there are similarities in Catholic and Protestant approaches to the two rituals, divergences exist related to polity, perspectives, and practices. Most Protestants consider ordinances as symbols of grace but not agents that contain grace. However, this does not diminish the importance of ordinances and rituals. If not in doctrine, then experientially, there is an expectation that participating in ordinances invites God into a gathered community.

As mentioned, ecclesiology focuses on the church and its rituals. For many, these rituals are means of grace. The concept of gathering as a "Trinity-centric means of grace" is central to Communion Ecclesiology. It suggests that the Godhead's essence and

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<sup>17</sup> United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, "Sacraments," United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2022, <https://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/sacraments-and-sacramentals>.

activity (grace) are present and productive when Christians gather as a community for in-person worship.

### *Manifested Communion Ecclesiology*

What does Communion Ecclesiology look like? For Marita Winters, it suggests that not only is the gathered church a sacrament, the participating, gathered body of baptized believers exemplify and actuate communion.<sup>18</sup> Bonhoeffer shares the sentiment. In his book *Life Together*, he writes, “Christian brotherhood is not an ideal...it is a reality created by God in Christ that we must participate in.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, for theologian Brent Peterson, participation prefaces relation, restoration, and transformation. In *Worship as Relational Renewal and Redemption of the World*, Peterson contends that communal worship makes people more human and more healed. As humanized, healed, and rescued participants, people become God’s agents of healing and restoration in the community.<sup>20</sup> Lack of participation also informs the perspective of pastor and theologian Peter Bush. Through historical inquiry and Practical Theology, Bush demonstrates how the church, compromising its sacramentality and communion, has innovated away participation.<sup>21</sup> Moreover, for Justin McLendon, the normative, embodied gathering of God’s people is a

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<sup>18</sup> Winters, “Communion Ecclesiology and Communication in the Post-Vatican II Church,” 9.

<sup>19</sup> Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community*, 1st ed., trans. John W. Doberstein (New York, NY: Harper and Row, 1954), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Brent Peterson, “Worship as Relational Renewal and Redemption of the World,” *Relational Theology: A Contemporary Introduction*, ed. Brint Montgomery, Thomas Jay Oord, and Karen Strand Winslow (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2012), 78-79.

<sup>21</sup> Peter Bush, “Technology and Worship: Effect and Impact,” *Technology and Theology*, ed. William H. U. Anderson (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020), 124, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=6335715>.

means of grace – communal and personal.<sup>22</sup> He further suggests that the church is a sacrament that contains sacraments. In this dynamic, McLendon posits, the means of grace are channels through which the Godhead gives life, gifts, and empowerment to the church body and community.<sup>23</sup> Theologian Avery Dulles offers five models of the church and wades into the concept of Communion Ecclesiology. For Dulles, the “church as communion” and the “church as a sacrament” both center on grace, the former where grace is highlighted through love-filled unity and the latter where grace emanates through visible ritualistic presence.<sup>24</sup> Unquestionably, both models hinge on gathering and participating. In summary, Communion Ecclesiology proposes that the grace of God is conveyed in the love-filled, embodied, and participating community of believers, which is visible and sacramental.

### **Contemporary Perspectives and Profiles**

With a few exceptions, much of what has been covered thus far offers a historical view of ecclesiology and Communion Ecclesiology. Now, it is essential to pivot and unpack contemporary perspectives that chart a path forward. As Thomas and Wondra propose, culture and history impact doctrine and action, and the church must be flexible enough to “assume new forms” to meet current needs. This requires renewal and presence where God is at work.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Justin McLendon, “Virtual Church and the Means of Grace: Legitimately ‘Real’ or Not?” *Technology and Theology*, ed. William H. U. Anderson (Wilmington, DE: Vernon Press, 2020), 127, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/dtl/detail.action?docID=6335715>.

<sup>23</sup> McLendon, “Virtual Church and the Means of Grace,” 134-135.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas and Wondra, *Theology*, 266.

<sup>25</sup> Thomas and Wondra, 265.



Communion Ecclesiology is not sectarian, it is ecumenical. Below are brief overviews that provide primers on an array of contemporary thought surrounding it from voices within the Catholic, Eastern Orthodox, Baptist (American), Pentecostal, Presbyterian, Virtual, and Black churches (American). These are not denominational positions but snapshots from contemporary theologians that contain communion ecclesiology artifacts. In the spirit of ecumenicalism, this foundation will first consider the statement on the Eucharist from the World Council of Churches' Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry Faith and Order Paper 111.

The World Council of Churches is a fellowship of over 300 churches from more than 100 countries. Those churches represent half a billion Christians. In 1982, it published a Faith and Order document that covers baptism, eucharist, and ministry, from an ecumenical perspective. It is the "most widely studied and reviewed ecumenical document of faith in the world."<sup>26</sup> One section, consistent with views on Communion of Ecclesiology, defines "The Eucharist as the Communion of the Faithful" thusly:

19. The eucharistic communion with Christ who nourishes the life of the Church is at the same time communion within the body of Christ which is the Church. The sharing in one bread and the common cup in a given place demonstrates and effects the oneness of the sharers with Christ and with their fellow sharers in all times and places. It is in the eucharist that the community of God's people is fully manifested. Eucharistic celebrations always have to do with the whole Church, and the whole Church is involved in each local eucharistic celebration.<sup>27</sup>

The ecumenical statement provides an overarching perspective that provides a springboard to now dive into various voices on Communion Ecclesiology.

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<sup>26</sup> World Council of Churches. Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry: Faith and Order Paper no. 111, the "Lima Text," <https://www.oikoumene.org/resources/documents/baptism-eucharist-and-ministry-faith-and-order-paper-no-111-the-lima-text>.

<sup>27</sup> *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry*, Faith and Order Paper, No. 111, (Geneva, Switzerland: World Council of Churches, 1982), 14.

*A Catholic Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

Hans Kung is a renowned post-Vatican II theologian and professor. Many theologians view his book, *The Church*, as monumental. Kung's perspective and criticism of the Catholic church cost him Roman Catholic theologian credentials. However, he is still recognized as a leader in contemporary Catholic ecclesiology.

Kung believes the Catholic church requires renewal to be communion and sacramental. He suggests reforms that make the church more participatory, charismatic, and open-modeled.<sup>28</sup> Kung views the church as the people of God and pilgrims who are unnecessarily tied to institutionalism and clericalism. To increase effectiveness, he believes the church must embrace the concept of universal priesthood. For Kung, the church must also be agile, mirroring its members who adapt, acclimate, and embrace the times. This, he believes, occurs when the church remembers its Christian nature, surrender to the sacraments, and operate as a diverse sacramental community.<sup>29</sup> Kung writes, the church "must be a (sacramental) meal-fellowship, a koinonia and communio...with Christ and Christians or it is not the Church of Christ."<sup>30</sup> He further notes participating in the Eucharist does not make the church the body of Christ, it reveals that the gathered church community is the body of Christ.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Hans Küng, *The Church*, Trans. By Ray Ockenden and Rosaleen Ockenden (New York, NY: Sheed and Ward, 1967), 341.

<sup>29</sup> Kärkkäinen, 106, 112.

<sup>30</sup> Küng, *The Church*, 223.

<sup>31</sup> Kung, 224.

*An Eastern Orthodox Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

According to Kärkkäinen, Metropolitan Bishop John Zizioulas is the leading Eastern Orthodox theologian, and his reach extends into the ecumenical community. Zizioulas' primary theological focus is *koinonia* (communion). For Zizioulas, church membership – faith, baptism, and the eucharist – transforms individuals into the image of God and converts them into a community. While Zizioulas shares the Catholic position on institutionalism and clericalism, especially related to the sacraments, he also posits that all believers serve as “ordained.”<sup>32</sup>

Sacraments and the Spirit are symbiotic in Zizioulas' ecclesiology. He suggests Pauline theology and the writings of Ignatius support the idea that Greek words used to describe the local assembly and the Eucharist are purposefully interchangeable and denote they are the same reality.<sup>33</sup> The Eucharist is not just in the church, according to him, the church is a Eucharistic community linked to all people at a gathering in a specific geography.<sup>34</sup> In support of this, Zizioulas describes the Eucharist as an “assembly, a community, a network of relation, in which believers ‘subsists.’”<sup>35</sup> Likewise, he argues that the community's essence is not a binary choice of word or Spirit but both. Zizioulas suggests the Spirit constitutes the church community, provides charisma, and directs its mission to proclaim the word.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Zizioulas, *Being As Communion: Studies in Personhood and the Church*, Contemporary Greek Theologians, No. 4 (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985), 215, 216.

<sup>33</sup> John Zizioulas, *The Eucharistic Communion and the World* (London, UK: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2011), 100, 101.

<sup>34</sup> Zizioulas, *Being As Communion*, 247.

<sup>35</sup> Zizioulas, 60.

<sup>36</sup> Zizioulas, 136-140.

*An American Baptist Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

James McClendon's Communion Ecclesiology centers on discipleship and doctrine. For McClendon, the church is a forward-looking, Spirit-bound, gathered community of learners.<sup>37</sup> He sees the church as a "set-apart community" of people and preachers who gather as a eucharistic community where the presence of Jesus dwells, and the primary goal of worship is pleasing God not self.<sup>38</sup> Like Zizioulas, clergy have a prominent place in his Communion Ecclesiology. Moreover, their role helps comprise his wider view of the church as: 1) members subject to the rule of God, 2) a place with a Christ-centered leader, and 3) a Spirit-led fellowship of the redeemed. God always leads his people forward. Therefore, for McClendon, attending church is equivalent to traveling to "Zion."<sup>39</sup>

*A Pentecostal Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

In *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, Amos Young offers a Pentecostal perspective on ecclesiology. He asserts that the church's unity is rooted in neither clericalism, structure nor the sacraments, but it is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit.<sup>40</sup> Historically, he notes, Pentecostal Ecclesiology developed among diverse, yet

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<sup>37</sup> James McClendon, *Systematic Theology: Vol. II, Doctrine*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1994), 367.

<sup>38</sup> McClendon, *Systematic Theology*, 377.

<sup>39</sup> McClendon, 371.

<sup>40</sup> Amos Young, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 259.

marginalized, people who were reconciled not by institutionalism but by God's Spirit.<sup>41</sup>

Young writes, "Pentecostal sacramentality means that the unity of the church comes about through the eschatological work of the Spirit. The word made flesh and the Spirit breathing and making the word real in and through the community of saints constitutes the work of the triune God."<sup>42</sup> In this, he employs language consistent with the trinity-linked hallmarks of Communion Ecclesiology. The Godhead moves in gathered Christian communities. Furthermore, for Amos, the embodied, collective experience and guidance of the Holy Spirit are what gives the church its identity and message.<sup>43</sup>

#### *A Presbyterian Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

Peter Bush, a tenured pastor, and theologian, provides another view on Communion Ecclesiology. In *Technology and Worship: Effect and Impact*, Bush tours through technological advances in the Presbyterian church and correlates them with tangible ecclesiological challenges. Bush does not oppose technology, but he simply suggests that progress in one area may prove profane in others. Bush defines worship as a time believers traditionally gather to praise, pray, preach, and partake of the sacraments. He traces the history of liturgical shifts in songs (from psalmodies to solos), sounds (from hands to electric instruments), structures (from acoustic design to the latest audiovisual), preaching (from visiting the church to video and virtual), and sacraments (single loaf and one cup to pre-package units that are served to sitting members). Bush believes these "advancements" create a culture of passivity and replace the expectation of

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<sup>41</sup> Young, *The Spirit Poured*, 260.

<sup>42</sup> Young, 259.

<sup>43</sup> Young, 261.

participation.<sup>44</sup> Individuality, according to Bush, shifts the common table to a personal place setting. Thus, compromising a key tenant of Communion Ecclesiology – communal, participatory worship. While Bush is sensitive to exceptions and emergencies like incapacity, travel, and pandemics, he suggests the normalization of passivity and individualism has compromised the church’s sense of communion and power.<sup>45</sup>

### *A Virtual Church Leader’s Communion Ecclesiology*

Virtual Church is relatively new territory. While many refer to streaming services and digitally delivered content as a virtual church, according to Justin McLendon and Doug Estes, it is not. In *Virtual Church and the Means of Grace: Legitimately Real or Not Real*, Justin McLendon explains that virtual churches do not have a physical location. They exist entirely in a virtual environment, and their participants do not physically experience other believers.<sup>46</sup> McLendon concedes that many churches employ technology for good reasons, but embodied church gathering is the normative “means of grace.”<sup>47</sup> Making the case, he points to the sacraments. For him, sacraments as means and channels of grace required embodiment. This, he believes, applies to the gathered assembly.<sup>48</sup> To McLendon, the virtual environment is counter to the plethora of “one another” passages in the Bible, and endorses individualism that separates and weakens both the individual

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<sup>44</sup> Bush, *Technology and Worship*, 119.

<sup>45</sup> Bush, 122-124.

<sup>46</sup> McLendon, “Virtual Church and the Means of Grace,” 129.

<sup>47</sup> McLendon, 127.

<sup>48</sup> McLendon, “Virtual Church and the Means of Grace,” 138.

and church. Ultimately, this leads to sin and communal impotence.<sup>49</sup> In closing, he declares the virtual church may be a “good additive, but it is an unsuitable replacement for pastoral care and embodied gathering.”<sup>50</sup> McLendon punctuates his point by quoting a relatively recently denominational declaration: “Spirituality without physicality is Gnosticism.”<sup>51</sup>

Counter to McLendon, pastor and author Douglas Estes champions the virtual church concept in his book *SimChurch: Being the Church in a Virtual World*. Estes concedes that the virtual church still has work to do to realize its potential and maintain solidarity with sacred practices, but he sees the virtual environment as a ripe harvest.<sup>52</sup> According to Estes, over a billion people are online, and seventy million already participate in entirely virtual worlds.<sup>53</sup> The first virtual church was created in 1985. Since then, the concept has grown.<sup>54</sup> For Estes and many others, the virtual church experience is real and consistent with biblical, historical, and contemporary ecclesiology.<sup>55</sup> Like other modern theologians, he offers a thorough presentation by supporting his claims with historical inquiry, scripture, and Practical Theology.<sup>56</sup> He invokes Hans Kung and

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<sup>49</sup> McLendon, “Virtual Church and the Means of Grace,” 143.

<sup>50</sup> McLendon, 147.

<sup>51</sup> McLendon, 144.

<sup>52</sup> Douglas Estes, *SimChurch: Being the Church in the Virtual World* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009), 178-181.

<sup>53</sup> Estes, *SimChurch*, 19-20.

<sup>54</sup> Estes, 26.

<sup>55</sup> Estes, 33, 35.

<sup>56</sup> Estes, 52-64.

the reformers when arguing for repeated church renewal and adaptability.<sup>57</sup> Estes also agrees with others when he suggests that a church is not a church because it wears the label. Authenticity and essence are required.<sup>58</sup> Part of that essence surrounds the sacraments.

Again, Estes makes a concession – most virtual churches steer clear of the sacraments to avoid offending participants.<sup>59</sup> However, Estes suggests the sacraments – baptism and communion – can be celebrated through alternative methods. He offers four tactics:

1. Symbolic celebration, where a member's meditation replaces the act.
2. Avatar-mediated celebration within the virtual environment.
3. Extensional virtual observance, where members substitute natural items for sacraments.
4. Outsourced virtual communion, where members observe the sacraments at a local church.

Ultimately, Estes does not believe the virtual church will replace the physical church, though he suggests it is a local body of believers experiencing communion in a virtual environment.<sup>60</sup>

#### *A Black Church Leader's Communion Ecclesiology*

Theologian and Professor James H. Evans, Jr, offers a Black perspective on Communion Ecclesiology in *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology*. For Evans, to understand ecclesiology in the Black church, it is essential to

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<sup>57</sup> Estes, 65.

<sup>58</sup> Estes, 53.

<sup>59</sup> Estes, 117.

<sup>60</sup> Estes, *SimChurch*, 76.



understand Black history.<sup>61</sup> The Black church (not denominations) was born during the trauma of slavery and reared in segregation. Its purpose was communal spirituality, survival, and solidarity. Evans, citing greats like Howard Thurman, Carter G. Woodson, E. Franklin Frazier, Zora Neal Hurston, W. E. B. DuBois, James Cone, Albert Cleage, and others, paints the picture of a dynamic community bonded by oppression and bound for liberation. Hence, the Black church identifies mainly with the image of the oppressed people of God.<sup>62</sup> Evans asserts that fractured clans and tribes found a new community and identity in the Black church.<sup>63</sup> It was a refuge from a hostile world.

While the genesis of the Black church is generally accepted, historical perspectives vary about its profile. According to Evans, Woodson – the author of *The History of the Negro Church* – describes the Black church as a politically focused institution where ministers, bishops, and leaders press for social and political change.<sup>64</sup> Next, Evans cites E. Franklin Frazier’s *The Negro Church in America* and suggests the church is a place for social cohesion, where community and progressive cooperation are cultivated.<sup>65</sup> Later he proposes, through the observations of Zora Neale Hurston and W. E. B. DuBois, that the Black church is a place of cultural expression and creativity, where the oppressed find release. He writes, Hurston’s *The Sanctified Church* and Dubois’ *The Souls of Black Folks*, offer their own “marks of the church.” For them, worship is the main event. It contours around music, preaching, and the “frenzy.” During these moments,

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<sup>61</sup> Evans, *African American Theology*, 119.

<sup>62</sup> Evans, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Evans, 121-122.

<sup>64</sup> Evans, 122.

<sup>65</sup> Evans, 123.

the community and communicant become one in improvisation, inspiration, and celebration. Even the “shout” was communal. Evans, pointing to the liberation and relief of worship, adds, “...the believer is often left physically exhausted, but always spiritually empowered.”<sup>66</sup> Though inspirational and informative, Evans suggests these perspectives are still insufficient descriptors of the essence of the Black church.

Professor Evans argues the Black church is more than an institution, common community, and cultural expression. The Black church is a spiritual community with a communal mission.<sup>67</sup> He offers three theological and biblical modalities of the Black church – the company of the elect, the family of God, and the nation of God.<sup>68</sup> Each modality points to communion (unity) as identification, purpose, and mission. Evans suggests these modalities point to a greater revelation about the Black church and God than mere liturgy, polity, and style.

After reading Evans, it is clear he accepts the Black church community, by function and form, as sacramental. He too uses language common to Communion Ecclesiology. Evans posits that kerygma – preaching and proclamation – makes the gathered community special. Likewise, the koinonia – communion – is a Holy Spirit superintended act that gives the church its character and solidarity. Next, Evans suggests the Black church is sent into the world as liberated liberators.<sup>69</sup> The church can only do this as a cohesive, Spirit-gifted gathering, where the preacher and people serve together in their context. Finally, Evans discusses the ordinances (sacraments). He espouses

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<sup>66</sup> Evans, *African American Theology*, 124.

<sup>67</sup> Evans, 126.

<sup>68</sup> Evans, 128.

<sup>69</sup> Evans, 136.

traditional protestant views on the ordinances and offers a contextual departure that represents the culture. For Evans, baptism and communion are not just recollection rituals to the Black church. They are acts of communal initiation and celebration. In them, Christ is found among the oppressed and again strengthens their solidarity.<sup>70</sup> Communion is not just recommended, it is a multi-directional induction.

### *Womanist Theology and Black Church Communion Ecclesiology*

When discussing Black church communion ecclesiology, it is important not to ignore the perspective of Black women who champion Womanist Theology. Like the essence and efficaciousness of the sacraments, liberation, and community care are important to the Womanist community. For seminary professor and author Dr. Donna E. Allen, communal and shared power, over amassed authority vested in a single leader, attracted her to Womanist Theology. This, she believes, leads to better solutions for faith communities. In the book *Black Practical Theology*, she suggests that rituals (communal worship and communion) consistent with communion ecclesiology can solve challenges related to youth, intergenerational disconnect, and ageism in the Black community. To Allen, these “rituals of resistance” will combat the growing community divide.<sup>71</sup>

The ritual she focuses on is the communion meal. Her theology surrounding this sacrament is consistent with other theologians highlighted in this foundation. Allen writes that while the sermon is important, the sacred communal experience enables spiritual and

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<sup>70</sup> Evans, *African American Theology*, 138-140.

<sup>71</sup> Donna E. Allen, “Rituals of Resistance to Strengthen Intergenerational Relations,” in *Black Practical Theology*, eds. Dale P. Andrews, Dale P and Robert London Smith, Jr., (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2015), 48-53.

social formation.<sup>72</sup> More specifically, she offers an added dimension aimed at a spiritual message and a practical solution to a prevalent communal problem – generational disconnect. Allen believes the communion meal provides an opportunity for generations to gather and reimagine the message of the meal by passing along morals and community history, allowing both the young and old to lead parts related to practice and proclamation. This spirit-superintended, intergenerational dialogue over a common meal, Allen posits, will strengthen the community, and break down ever-widening barriers that threaten to disconnect youth from their past and their elders, and vice versa. The eucharistic moment – reviving the past through re-telling both the communion and cultural story – helps shape the present and the future. In this way, Allen believes embodied gathering not only meets the spiritual mandate of the scripture, but it also mirrors what Jesus did during the meal with his disciples – he taught, corrected, and further connected them.<sup>73</sup>

### **Analysis, Synthesis, and Implication for the Context**

Common perspectives and a few contrary thoughts are found in the various views of contemporary ecclesiology theologians. However, the common thread in each is the reality of the presence, power, and proclamation of the Godhead dwelling among united people. While some theologians tether their arguments to scripture and abstract concepts, only the Black church ecclesiology binds it to trauma and existential threat.

For the Black church, theological answers matter more about pragmatism than pontification, precepts, and platitudes. In a context that has been historically hostile and is

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<sup>72</sup> Donna E. Allen, “Rituals of Resistance,” 51.

<sup>73</sup> Donna E. Allen, 53-54.

presently polarized, the decision to gather in the Black church is not just discretionary, it is indispensable. In *Communion Ecclesiology*, Kung recommends a renewed church, Zizioulas advises on a pneumatologically fresh expression within institutionalism, McClendon suggests a disciple-based gathering with a missiological focus, Bush seeks liturgical participation, and McLendon and Estes arm-wrestle over the veracity of the virtual frontier. These efforts are noble and beneficial to the doctrine of communion ecclesiology. However, the complexity of the current context of the Black church requires an existential approach to Communion Ecclesiology. One that not only focuses on holiness, wholeness, and wellness. It has, and it must.

COVID-19 revealed old wounds and current inequities. Health disparities, unfair hiring practices, economic inequality, police brutality, injustice, gentrification, disparate inflation, voter suppression, systemic racism, and community unrest still exist. The crisis only made them more apparent. Unlike other faith communities, these issues are church issues in the Black community. Virtual church is not the biggest threat to the Black church community. Digital inequity ensures that. However, forsaking its nature – Spirit-filled solidarity and liberation – compromises its character and cripples’ community impact. In *A Reader on Ecclesiology*, Bryan P. Stone cites Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s declaration that the most effective church is not preoccupied with platitudes and detached from reality. The church is responsible for individual, communal, and social situational change, or it is not qualified to be called the church.<sup>74</sup> Sacraments have a purpose. Moreover, the gathered church is a sacrament and means of God’s liberating grace. On the contrary, the writer of Hebrews 10:25 reminds and warns the reader, a

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<sup>74</sup> Bryan P. Stone, “Martin Luther King, Jr.,” *A Reader in Ecclesiology* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2016), 193.

disconnected community is a weakened community. It no longer reflects the Imago Dei (image of God).

In my context, Cleft of the Rock Church continued to safely gather even when it was risky. The sensitivity that informed the strategy to gather is like Evans's "spiritual community" concept.<sup>75</sup> Initially, it was surprising that attendance swelled when the church celebrated ordinances and sacraments. This revealed a deep reverence in the community for those rituals. Likewise, participation spiked when the church planned outreach events to heal human suffering. In both instances, the character of the community was clear – people valued sacraments, solidarity, and service that expressed love. As a result, the fellowship grew. Finally, the church embraced a grand mission. The building campaign became a rallying point and uniting vision during the pandemic. Since then, the church has joyfully and steadfastly worshiped outside while marching toward its "Zion" – the construction of a new mixed-use community space. In this, the church embraced the reputation of a "pilgrim people of God" and solidified communion. Once again, crisis baptized people into a community. The pandemic did not prevent progress, it propelled it.

### Summary

Communion Ecclesiology reminds the church that the gathered community is more than a meeting or show for individual consumers. The church is described using several names, words, and images, but those do not make the church a church. Likewise, varying perspectives persist about the church's presence – visible or invisible, universal,

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<sup>75</sup> Evans, *African American Theology*, 126.

virtual, or local. However, it is undeniable that a gathered community functions best, especially during a crisis.

History, the Bible, and theology reveal that the church and its members are strengthened by embodied fellowship and sacramental solidarity. The means of grace flow when believers physically gather in Holy Spirit-constituted unity and love. A church that practices the sacraments and proclaims Jesus Christ is more than a common fellowship, it is transformative and liberating. Why did some church communities safely leap forward while others paused or pulled the plug during the pandemic? Extenuating circumstances aside, I suggest ecclesiological orientation is a key factor.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **INTERDISCIPLINARY FOUNDATIONS**

Any crisis demands a response. Especially from leaders. Responses may run the gamut of emotions, decisions, and actions. In Matthew twenty-seven and twenty-eight, Mary Magdalene responds to the passion and resurrection by championing the concept of community among the dispersed disciples. Likewise, in response to the Black Death, some in the fourteenth-century church innovate to deliver the sacraments and stabilize the community. Similarly, promoters of Communion Ecclesiology commend the concept of a spirit-led community as a sacramental response to a crisis that enables survival, solidarity, and service. Each instance requires bold, risk-embracing leadership to produce positive results.

What is this type of leadership and where does it come from? Biblically, in Mary Magdalene's case, one may point to the transformative encounter she had with Jesus in Luke chapter eight, and her subsequent inclusion in Jesus' inner circle. While, historically, some may suggest the fourteenth century church's actions were simply in response to communal needs and external pressures. Moreover, theologically, those with a sacrament-centric approach to ecclesiology may point to God's gathered people as a singular solution to a crisis. Those perspectives may contain some merit but fail to answer these practical questions: What type of leadership best helps in times of crisis, and how can the church develop more of these leaders?

Competency-based leadership development is not new. The framework is common in both the public and private sectors. However, it seems the church lags when it



comes to developing its leaders for a crisis. While other institutions focus on science-based deliberate development to build crisis leaders and resilient communities, church leadership competencies center more on spiritual formation and the “Great man theory” than essential leadership skills.<sup>1</sup> If the academy, planting organizations, churches, and ministries want to thrive during a crisis, they must deliberately develop crisis leaders capable of building resilient communities. Prayer works, but it works even better when accompanied by deliberately developed practical competencies. Therefore, it is crucial to identify the leadership competencies required for crisis response and community recovery.

In this interdisciplinary study, I explore crisis context, leadership, risk, and competencies, explicitly focusing on adaptable leadership. Lastly, I will revisit previously presented biblical, historical, and theological foundations to integrate with this interdisciplinary focus.

### Context

Retired Four-star General Stanley A. McChrystal, in the book *Risk: A Users Guide*, writes, “In a crisis, leadership is the unifying force that inspires and coordinates the efforts of many.”<sup>2</sup> It is a forgone conclusion that organizational leaders will face crises. Dr. Holly Hutchins and Dr. Jia Wang, in the journal “Advances in Developing Human Resources,” write, “Corporate scandals, disease, outbreaks, terrorist attacks, and natural disasters are just a few examples of crisis that threaten the sustainability and

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<sup>1</sup> The “Great man theory of leadership” is a classic notion that suggests some leaders are born with special abilities uncommon and unreachable by others.

<sup>2</sup> Stanley McChrystal and Anna Butrico, *Risk: A User’s Guide* (New York, NY: Portfolio, 2021), xii.

ultimate survival of organizations today.”<sup>3</sup> Hence, leaders need to recognize that crisis management will rest on their shoulders during their tenure. In those instances, the measure of success or failure may be mortality more than money—case in point, the coronavirus disease.

McChrystal, a special operations leader with decades of experience in crisis conditions, suggests leadership failure is responsible for some of the pandemic’s impact. He reports that disaster and emergency response leaders unearthed systemic weaknesses during a planning exercise called Crimson Contagion before the pandemic. The enemy during this virtual exercise was an uncontrolled virus. Unfortunately, many of the lessons learned and recommendations from the tabletop exercise were ignored and later contributed to chaos, casualties, and fatalities.<sup>4</sup> The present global pandemic serves as another reminder that leadership matters, especially during crisis conditions. Before exploring the depths of crisis leadership, it is essential to frame the current crisis context.

Global pandemics have local consequences. In San Antonio, Texas, Cleft of the Rock Church continues to negotiate a crisis context. When the pandemic hit in late 2019, no one within the context could predict its impact or outcome. During the pandemic, the church’s leaders were challenged to guide the organization through unprecedented circumstances within its contemporary context. While the church had experienced a successful launch three years prior, the pandemic changed the church’s ecosystem in ways unimaginable. As a result, the church entered a crisis period marked by volatility,

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<sup>3</sup> Holly M. Hutchins and Jia Wang, “Organizational Crisis Management and Human Resource Development: A Review of the Literature and Implications to HRD Research and Practice,” *Advances in Developing Human Resources* 10, no. 3 (2008): 326.

<sup>4</sup> McChrystal and Butrico, *Risk*, xi-ii.

uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (V.U.C.A.). Strategists use the acronym V.U.C.A. to describe this type of crisis context.

### *Crisis and V.U.C.A.*

Not all crises are created equal. In *The Encyclopedia of Leadership: Crisis*, Peter Drucker defines crisis as a novel disruption that exceeds expectations and experience.<sup>5</sup> In doing so, Drucker posits that high-stakes situations, routine emergencies, and recurrent crises differ from a true crisis. The former instances are typical, expected, or foreseeable; the latter can be unpreventable and overwhelming.<sup>6</sup> A true crisis impacts individuals, challenges leaders, and disrupts the environment by creating a V.U.C.A.-filled context.

V.U.C.A. (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) is not a new phrase. The term was first coined in 1998 at Army War College and later became prevalent after the catastrophic events on September 11, 2001.<sup>7</sup> Though its origin and popularity are tethered to the military and an act of war, its application and impact span industries, economies, and communities. In fact, the private sector frequently uses the acronym to describe ever-changing market conditions.

In his book *Leadership in Disruptive Times: Negotiating the New Balance*, Sattar Bawany, executive leader and award-winning consultant, defines terms used in V.U.C.A.. Volatility, he explains, denotes a period of change marked by extreme speed, volume,

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<sup>5</sup> Peter Drucker, "Crisis," in *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James Macgregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 4.

<sup>6</sup> Drucker, "Crisis," 2-3.

<sup>7</sup> Sattar Bawany, *Leadership in Disruptive Times* (New York, NY: Business Expert Press, 2020), 16.

and impact.<sup>8</sup> To Bawany, uncertainty best describes when decision-making information is unavailable or difficult to gather.<sup>9</sup> Additionally, complexity results when the impact of interconnected parts and relationships is unclear.<sup>10</sup> However, ambiguity results from misunderstanding an event that may have multiple meanings.<sup>11</sup> For Bawany and others, V.U.C.A. applies to crises in any situation. It is especially applicable to the present context shaped by the coronavirus.

COVID-19 worsened the context for every sector – nonprofit, public, and private. A cursory glance at the reverberating effects of the pandemic reveals a V.U.C.A. environment on steroids. As Bawany notes, presently, prices and supply chains are volatile. The tenure of the pandemic and the future of the economy are uncertain. Likewise, continual virus mutations and health implications are too complex for individuals and organizations to formulate actionable and sustainable plans. Not to mention, individuals, industry leaders, and elected officials are still managing mixed messages laden with conspiracies about the pandemic. Ambiguity is prevalent because of misunderstandings and mistrust.<sup>12</sup> In this context, many look to their leaders for answers. Unfortunately, leaders are also searching for solutions. Drucker, like McChrystal, observes that a turbulent context demands good leadership. He concedes, however, that a

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<sup>8</sup> Bawany, *Leadership in Disruptive Times*, 17.

<sup>9</sup> Bawany, 18.

<sup>10</sup> Bawany, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Bawany, 20.

<sup>12</sup> Bawany, 21-24.

crisis presents a unique challenge for leaders and perhaps, requires a different type of leadership.<sup>13</sup>

### *Leadership*

The word leadership has multiple definitions and meanings. Leadership is a discipline that draws from other disciplines. Before defining leadership, it is important to frame the study of leadership among other fields.

Professor, author, and presidential historian James MacGregor Burns sees the discipline of leadership as relatively new but ever-increasing. In the *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, he proposes that leadership draws heavily from other pre-existing disciplines.

Burns writes:

From history, the study of leadership gains understanding of the complexity of human events that variously offer opportunities and stumbling blocks to political actors. From philosophy, leadership derives knowledge of moral and ethical principles that direct day-to-day decisions and choices. From sociology and anthropology, leadership learns about the central roles of kinship and community that often ward off influences from the broader society. From political science, leadership draws concepts about power and its rootedness in economic, military, and other resources, its manifestations in subtle as well as dramatic forms, its channeling and manipulating of people, and its crucial role in the processes of change. From psychology, leadership grasps the central role of motivation in all human endeavors.<sup>14</sup>

### *Leadership Defined*

It is impossible to distinguish what a leader is from what a leader does. In Simon Sinek's best-selling book *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others*

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<sup>13</sup> Drucker, "Crisis," 4.

<sup>14</sup> George Goethals, Georgia Sorenson, and James Burns, *Encyclopedia of Leadership* (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 2.

*Don't*, it suggests, "If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader."<sup>15</sup> Dr. Peter G. Northouse, leadership professor and author, defines leadership as "...a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal."<sup>16</sup> Renowned Prussian General and military theorist Carl Von Clausewitz offers a different perspective, asserting, "Leadership in the military is unique in that military leaders routinely ask followers to risk their lives to achieve organizational goals. Moreover, the will to act derives not from financial gain but an instilled sense of duty."<sup>17</sup> Joke van Saane, professor and chair of Education Theology and Religious Studies at the Vrije University Amsterdam, distinguishes spiritual leadership as "...the process of influencing others about understanding and agreeing what needs to be done and how to do it, and the process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives."<sup>18</sup>

Though organization types and environments differ, each author's definition includes leaders, followers, actions, and goals. The same is true for Northouse, Prince and Tumlin, and Saane when discussing leadership types and functions. For Northouse, twenty-first-century leadership differs from the predominately power-dominance-centric

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<sup>15</sup> Simon Sinek, *Leaders Eat Last: Why Some Teams Pull Together and Others Don't* (New York, New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2014), x.

<sup>16</sup> Peter Northouse, "Introduction," in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 6.

<sup>17</sup> Howard T. Prince and Geoffrey R. Tumlin, "Military," in *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James Macgregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 2.

<sup>18</sup> Joke van Saane, "Personal Leadership as Form of Spirituality," in *Leading in a V.U.C.A. World: Integrating Leadership, Discernment and Spirituality*, 1st ed., ed. Jacobus Kok and Steven C. van den Heuvel (Basel, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 87.

dynamic of the past. Current approaches to leadership include Authentic Leadership, Spiritual Leadership, Servant Leadership, and Adaptive Leadership.<sup>19</sup>

Prince and Tumlin, citing Von Clausewitz, posit that military leadership is slightly different. Von Clausewitz, a key figure in global military leadership theory, focuses on ethical and organizational leadership.<sup>20</sup> This focus reflects the sacrificial nature of military service. Likewise, the need for ethics in using destructive power demands consistency in leadership, leaving very little to chance. Because the United States military embraces the idea that leaders are made, not born, it espouses a deliberate leadership development system that produces ethical leaders with competence and character.<sup>21</sup> Though it has power-dominance origins, the United States military also embraces leadership skills identified by Northouse. As a result, the United States military has the most sophisticated leadership development system globally and is considered the best trained and equipped military in modern history.<sup>22</sup>

Contemporary thought on spiritual leadership contains elements of the previously discussed leadership styles. Joke van Saane, in *Leading in a V.U.C.A. World: Integrating Leadership, Discernment, and Spirituality* defines leadership as influencing and facilitating motives, methods, and the merges of effort around a mission.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, according to Saane, traditional spiritual leadership is a god-ordained, institutionally sanctioned, community-centric, and soul-focused dynamic involving a leader and

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<sup>19</sup> Northouse, "Introduction," 4-5.

<sup>20</sup> Prince and Tumlin, "Military," 2.

<sup>21</sup> Prince and Tumlin, 7.

<sup>22</sup> Prince and Tumlin, 6 and 9.

<sup>23</sup> Saane, "Leadership Spirituality," 85.

follower.<sup>24</sup> However, Saane surmises that the “...rituals, relations, and religious experiences” alone will no longer meet the demands of the current religious context.<sup>25</sup> Adding to the essential leadership elements of leader, follower, action, and goal, Saane suggests that group and organization considerations are also vital.<sup>26</sup> In this view, spiritual leadership, perhaps more so than the others, is a shared and interdependent exchange that keeps the community in mind. Additionally, Saane advises that openness, growth, and attention to needs are also hallmarks of spiritual leadership.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, Saane believes that actions and activities that flow from this type of leadership “help in times of crisis.”<sup>28</sup>

To this point, this study has sought to define leadership and consider various types and functions. However, the discussion has not revealed foundational competencies nor made a case for crisis leadership. It is now important to discuss the competencies associated with the dimensions of leadership to seek to discover crisis leadership essentials. To do this, we pivot to one of the leading leadership development companies in the world.

The Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), a renowned global consulting firm, identifies three dimensions of leadership competencies that are helpful in times of calm and crisis. The three dimensions are: leading others, leading the organization, and leading

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<sup>24</sup> Saane, “Leadership Spirituality,” 93.

<sup>25</sup> Saane, 93.

<sup>26</sup> Saane, 87.

<sup>27</sup> Saane, 99.

<sup>28</sup> Saane, 96.



yourself.<sup>29</sup> Each dimension includes subordinate factors. Both the dimensions and characteristics are listed below:<sup>30</sup>

Leading Others	Leading the Organization	Leading Yourself
Managing Effective Teams and Work Groups	Managing Change	Developing Adaptability
Building and Maintaining Relationships	Solving Problems and Making Decisions	Increasing Self-Awareness
Valuing Diversity and Differences	Managing Politics and Influencing Others	Managing Yourself
Developing Others	Taking Risks and Innovating	Increasing Your Capacity to Learn
Communicating Effectively	Setting Vision and Strategy	Exhibiting Leadership Stature
	Managing the Work	Displaying Drive and Purpose
	Understanding and Navigating the Organization	Demonstrating Ethics and Integrity
	Enhancing Business Skills and Knowledge	

Table 2 Center for Creative Leadership

<sup>29</sup> David Berke, Michael E. Kossler, and Michael Wakefield, *Developing Leadership Talent* (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2008), 107.

<sup>30</sup> Berke, Kossler, and Wakefield, *Developing Leadership*, 107-110.

In the chart, each competency is mapped to a dimension of leadership. The competencies are not innate traits but learning opportunities to grow and develop. In a V.U.C.A. environment, learning is essential. Joke van Saane suggests that a culture and personal commitment to learning is the cradle of good leaders.<sup>31</sup>

The value of learning and leadership cannot be overstated, especially during turbulent times and crises. General Stanley McChrystal writes, “Leadership, more than any other factor, can make the system function or fail.”<sup>32</sup> Therefore, leaders need to be learners. This is true of leadership, regardless of the industry. It is equally valid that during V.U.C.A. moments, good leaders learn to embrace risk and thrive. Before discussing the competencies that enable leaders to take risks and thrive, it is important to discuss risk briefly.

### *Risk*

V.U.C.A.-impacted environments are full of risk. Risk involves exposure to a potential hazard or injury.<sup>33</sup> However, risk-taking may also lead to a reward. One challenge of risk-taking is that it often requires change without guaranteeing a positive outcome.<sup>34</sup> While many may try to prevent and manage risk, eliminating it is impossible. As General McChrystal concludes in *Risk*, “Too often our efforts to manage risk create

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<sup>31</sup> Saane, “Leadership Spirituality,” 101.

<sup>32</sup> McChrystal and Butrico, *Risk*, 186.

<sup>33</sup> Merriam-Webster.com, s.v. “risks,” Merriam-Webster.com, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/risk>.

<sup>34</sup> Laura Wahlin, “Moses as an Agent of Adaptability: An Inner Texture Analysis of Numbers 11,” *Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership* 9, no. 1 (2019): 257.

additional risks...If we try to make ourselves ‘bulletproof,’ we may ultimately collapse under the weight of our gear.”<sup>35</sup> Everyone faces risk, especially leaders.

How should leaders and organizations view risk? McChrystal asserts, “...leadership is the essential enabler— the hand on the dials that orchestrates a successful response to risk.”<sup>36</sup> Sattar Bawany suggests that leaders must be willing to take a measured risk during uncertainty.<sup>37</sup> Dr. Erika Jong and Gordon Parks postulate that risk-taking is not only a leadership requirement but also a community necessity.<sup>38</sup>

Further, Jong and Parks suggest that failing to take risks is a greater risk.<sup>39</sup> Even the Center for Creative Leadership’s research indicates that executives who avoid risk-taking are more likely to be “fired, demoted, or plateau” in their careers.<sup>40</sup> These observations seem to suggest that risk must not be avoided but embraced. However, these views are not limited to secular industries; they are also true of the church.

Karl Rahner, one of the most influential twentieth century Catholic theologians, penned an article on the “Theology of Risk.” He posits that risk is time and situation sensitive, and when the church is faced with uncertainty, it should choose the way of risk

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<sup>35</sup> McChrystal and Butrico, *Risk*, xxi.

<sup>36</sup> McChrystal and Butrico, xxi.

<sup>37</sup> Bawany, *Disruptive Times*, 19.

<sup>38</sup> Erica Jong and Gordon Parks, “Risk Taking,” *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James Macgregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 2.

<sup>39</sup> Jong and Parks, “Risk Taking,” 2-3.

<sup>40</sup> Allan Calarco, “Adaptable Leadership: What It Takes to Be a Quick-Change Artist,” CCL, <https://www.ccl.org/articles/white-papers/adaptable-leadership/>.

over tradition.<sup>41</sup> He does not suggest uncritical and whimsical risk-taking but a purposeful, intentional risk that leads to new developments for the being and mission of the church. For Rahner, the church must not ask, “How far should we go? It must ask how far can we go?”<sup>42</sup> Therefore, to Rahner, when the church faces uncertainty and doubt, the option that requires risk and innovation is best.<sup>43</sup> Jong and Park also touch on spirituality and risk-taking by suggesting that the spirituality of a risk-taker makes them better caretakers, identity builders, and risk-mentors.<sup>44</sup>

In leadership, especially during a crisis where V.U.C.A. is heightened, risk-taking is inevitable and necessary. However, leaders will not take risks unless they are willing to embrace change and adaptability. Adaptability not only determines who wins but, in some instances, who survives.<sup>45</sup>

### *Adaptable Leadership*

According to Allan Calarco, a leadership consultant at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL), adaptability is not just an asset; it is essential for leaders.<sup>46</sup> Much like leadership in general, it is difficult to separate what an adaptable leader is from what one does.

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<sup>41</sup> Karl Rahner, “Theology of Risk,” *The Furrow* 19, no. 5 (1968): 266, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/i27659665>.

<sup>42</sup> Rahner, “Theology of Risk,” 267.

<sup>43</sup> Rahner, 268.

<sup>44</sup> Jong and Parks, “Risk Taking,” 5.

<sup>45</sup> McChrystal and Butrico, *Risk*, 175.

<sup>46</sup> Calarco, “Adaptable Leadership,” 3.

In CCL's list of competencies, adaptable leadership is classified under the dimension of leading yourself and defined as the "...skills, abilities, or perspectives individuals need to adjust to change."<sup>47</sup> Sub-competencies for Adaptable Leadership include an "Openness to influence, flexibility, adaptability, embracing flexibility."<sup>48</sup> Though change management is a competency CCL classifies under leading the organization, Adaptable Leadership and Managing Change overlap.

Peter Northouse interchanges the word adaptive for adaptable. He sums up an elaborate definition of Adaptive Leadership by simply suggesting it is leadership that "...encourages people to adapt to change."<sup>49</sup> He adds that while Adaptive Leadership appears to be about the leader, it is really about the complex interaction of the leader and follower negotiating change together.<sup>50</sup>

Laura Wahlin, in "The Journal of Biblical Perspectives in Leadership," asserts that adaptable leadership is the follower-centric discipline that enables groups with diverse perspectives to problem solve and resolve challenges.<sup>51</sup> In her view, leaders attend to weak signals, embrace diversity, practice opportunism, manifest courage, and views challenges as opportunities.<sup>52</sup>

Sattar Bawany suggests that adaptable leaders know how to L.E.A.P. The acronym means they first think liberally to envision a new reality of options. Then, they

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<sup>47</sup> Berke, Kossler, and Wakefield, *Developing Leadership*, 110.

<sup>48</sup> Berke, Kossler, and Wakefield, 110.

<sup>49</sup> Peter Northouse, "Adaptive Leadership," in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 257.

<sup>50</sup> Northouse, "Adaptive Leadership," 274-275.

<sup>51</sup> Wahlin, "Moses as an Agent of Adaptability," 263.

<sup>52</sup> Wahlin, 246.

exhibit exuberance that provides optimism to their followers. Next, they embrace agility to negotiate obstacles. Finally, they partner to collaborate during a crisis.<sup>53</sup>

For others, adaptable leadership is synonymous with crisis leadership. Peter Drucker, a leadership and management expert, believes this type of leadership requires adaptation, improvisation, and innovation.<sup>54</sup> For Saane, adaptable spiritual leadership focuses on the inspiration and empowerment of the group to solve challenges.<sup>55</sup> Calarco proposes that leaders who adapt with cognitive, dispositional, and emotional flexibility rather than just cope are best positioned to lead.<sup>56</sup> In summary, Adaptable Leadership is a visionary, follower-centric competency that enables a group or community to achieve goals and thrive during change or crisis. Perhaps, a couple of examples will further illuminate the competency.

Moses and Nelson Mandela are great examples of adaptable leaders. In *Moses as an Agent of Adaptability: An Inner Texture Analysis of Numbers 11*, Laura Wahlin paints Moses as an archetypal adaptable leader. Moses encounters a constantly complaining crowd that has grown weary on their journey to Canaan in Numbers chapter eleven. It is a mixed crowd of Hebrews and other nationalities.<sup>57</sup> Despondent and overwhelmed, Moses turns to the Lord. He has no solution for his V.U.C.A.-filled context, so he asks God for death or help. God leads Moses to adapt. Moses is reminded to focus on the goal and goal-giver instead of the risk (potential for harm or injury). He adds additional elders and

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<sup>53</sup> Bawany, *Disruptive Times*, 27-29.

<sup>54</sup> Drucker, "Crisis," 4.

<sup>55</sup> Saane, "Leadership Spirituality," 98.

<sup>56</sup> Calarco, "Adaptable Leadership," 7-8.

<sup>57</sup> Wahlin, "Moses as an Agent of Adaptability," 247.

embraces diverse and shared leadership. Likewise, he explores alternatives and trusts God with the complex task of providing meat (quail) to the masses. In the end, Moses, Joshua, and the people learn from their V.U.C.A. experience and continue their journey. What could have been a breaking point becomes a faith-fueling experience.

In the *Encyclopedia of Leadership: Leadership Effectiveness*, John Nirenberg offers a comparative study of leadership styles. He highlights the leadership of Nelson Mandela, former President of South Africa. His presentation of Mandela points to an adaptable leader. He asserts that Mandela was a community consensus builder who believed in sharing power to achieve goals.<sup>58</sup> Mandela lived in a V.U.C.A., risk-filled context. Ultimately, he not only survived but thrived while building on a new vision for South Africa.

Adaptable Leadership works best in high-risk situations where the outcome is uncertain, and survival and success hinge on the organization or community. Here are a few final thoughts on this style of leadership. For Adaptable Leadership to be effective, the leader and follower must have a trusting relationship and be open to growth and change. Likewise, the leader and follower must view obstacles as opportunities for innovation and imagination. Finally, the leader and follower must focus beyond the crisis context.

Though Adaptable Leadership is a relatively new style among the ever-emerging discipline of leadership, its imprint may predate its formal founding. Perhaps, the foundations previously presented – biblical, historical, and theological – also contain elements of adaptable leadership.

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<sup>58</sup> James Cooper and John Nirenberg, “Leadership Effectiveness,” in *Encyclopedia of Leadership*, ed. George R. Goethals, Georgia J. Sorenson, and James Macgregor Burns (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2004), 4-5.

*Interdisciplinary: Biblical, Historical, Theological*

As mentioned, The Center for Creative Leadership identified three dimensions of leadership competencies. Adaptable Leadership is cataloged under leading yourself. Though Adaptable Leadership mirrors some features found in Managing Change (which falls under leading the organization), it stands alone as a necessary competency for leaders to develop. Again, Adaptable Leadership reflects the talent to adjust to change by exhibiting an openness to influence, flexibility, adaptability, and opportunity.<sup>59</sup> These characteristics will now be used as the format of the following syntheses of the biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations related to Adaptable Leadership.

### **Biblical Foundation**

*Openness to Change and Flexibility*

Mary Magdalene was a risk-taking leader during the passion and resurrection narrative. She galvanized the fractured community of disciples during a time of crisis. Mary exhibits an openness to change by visiting the burial site of Jesus during a V.U.C.A. moment. Unquestionably, Mary misses Jesus and perhaps, fears the consequences of visiting the guarded tomb. Yet, she presses forward to properly prepare Jesus' body for burial while the crisis persists. Likewise, she demonstrates openness to change when both an angel and the resurrected Jesus greet her and command her to tell the disciples to gather in Galilee. Finally, Mary also displays the flexibility to upend her planned agenda to carry out the new mandate of the risen Savior.

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<sup>59</sup> Berke, Kossler, and Wakefield, *Developing Leadership*, 110.



### *Adaptability and Opportunity*

Mary is the weary disciple who becomes a witness. She adapts and looks past the crucifixion to her sacred responsibility to execute Jesus' burial rites. However, she again adapts when she discovers death has given way to life. Excitedly, Mary looks past the tomb to the promised reunion in Galilee with Jesus and the other disciples. Despite the risk of potential injury and harm, Mary embraces the opportunity Jesus provides and in Matthew's gospel, immediately gathers the community with her message. Later, we find the fractured community of disciples empowered and thriving.

Mary Magdalene's actions are consistent with adaptable leadership. Her actions reveal the openness to change, flexibility, adaptability, and opportunity. Her story also depicts trust, problem-solving, and follower empowerment, consistent with contemporary perspectives on Adaptable Leadership. In a V.U.C.A.-filled moment, Mary leads the community.

## **Historical Foundation**

### *Openness to Change and Flexibility*

In the fourteenth century, John Trillek, the Bishop of Hereford in the Province of Canterbury, provided sound leadership for a community in chaos. During that time, the Black Death claimed millions of lives, and its reverberating effects impacted his context's social, economic, and religious dimensions. While others retreated, Trillek

leaned in. He inherited a tough assignment during turbulent times. Yet, he diligently embraced the work as the plague overwhelmed the region and depleted the church.

Some in the community sought to cling to and recover past possessions and processes. Others, however, forged new paths and envisioned new opportunities.<sup>60</sup> The latter is true of Bishop Trillek. He steadfastly and systematically led the church to pivot and innovate to serve the community and continue church operations.<sup>61</sup> Trillek also displayed an openness to change and flexibility when he allowed orders to creatively generate revenue to meet parish needs.<sup>62</sup> Trillek functioned as a church and community leader during and after the pandemic, but he kept the sacraments central to his service to a community recovering from a crisis.

### *Adaptability and Opportunity*

Bishop Trillek's adaptability and willingness to turn obstacles into opportunities shone brightly when he accelerated the ordination process to shore up the priest and lay leader shortages.<sup>63</sup> He also reassigned and provided strong leadership to an incapable cadre of spiritual leaders who were thrown into disarray during the pandemic.<sup>64</sup> Ultimately, his diligence and consistency during V.U.C.A. times built a cadre of crisis leaders, re-established sacramental prominence, and ensured community resilience.

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<sup>60</sup> William J. Dohar, *The Black Death and Pastoral Leadership: Diocese of Hereford in the Fourteenth Century* (Baltimore, MD: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 61.

<sup>61</sup> Dohar, *Diocese at Hereford*, 63.

<sup>62</sup> Dohar, 65.

<sup>63</sup> Dohar, , 67-69.

<sup>64</sup> Dohar, 72-73.

Bishop Trillek's risk-taking is more consistent with Karl Rahner's views in the Theology of Risk than politics or money. Trillek demonstrates strategic, adaptable leadership that produces positive results. His efforts also reflect the spiritual dimensions of Adaptable Leadership that champion the importance of the community and organization in addition to goal achievement.

### **Theological Foundation**

#### *Openness to Change and Flexibility*

Theologians who focus on Communion Ecclesiology view the church and community as a sacrament with sacraments that convey the means of God's grace. A common thread in Communion Ecclesiology is the importance of priesthood (leadership). While the significance of universal priesthood is often repeated, this does not overshadow the importance of the spiritual leader in the context.

Catholics require a right relationship with the institutional church and bishops. Likewise, a church is not authentic in the Eastern Orthodox community unless a right relationship with bishops exists. Also, some Baptist and Presbyterian theologians make pastors and pastoral care central to their arguments about the quality of their Christian communities. Moreover, even virtual church theologians count church leadership as essential to their liturgy and campus operations. Clearly, collaborative communities still extol sound leadership. Unquestionably, in volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times, risk-taking leaders who value love, justice, righteousness, community, and mission are critical.

Dr. James H. Evans, Jr., a Black church theologian, provides a lengthy discourse on the historical and contemporary pastoral roles in the Black church context. In his view, the Black pastor is not just a masterful rhetorician. The amalgamation of Evan's views paints the Black pastor as a proclaiming, prophetic, and political liberator who pushes for change.

When discussing the Black church, Dr. James Evans, Jr. reminds the reader that it was birthed during a time of chaos.<sup>65</sup> The term V.U.C.A. perfectly sums up the historical and contemporary context of the Black church. Because of this, Black church leaders have always embraced and championed change (liberation) – at risk of injury and harm.<sup>66</sup>

### *Adaptability and Opportunity*

As Evans suggests, the Black church and its adaptable leaders are ever renewing and changing (innovation and imagination) to incorporate the spiritual gifts of others to meet the social and spiritual needs of the community.<sup>67</sup> This requires a trusting, flexible partnership between the community and a contextual spiritual leader to be most effective. Evans points to the work of Dr. Albert Cleage to suggest that the Black church, through sacramental symbology, must continue to baptize oppressed people into a new

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<sup>65</sup> James H. Evans, *We Have Been Believers: An African American Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2012), 123.

<sup>66</sup> Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 135.

<sup>67</sup> Evans, 138.

community (learning) and share the common table (communion) that reminds it of the past and rededicates it for the future (opportunity and liberation to thrive).<sup>68</sup>

### Summary

Perhaps Mary and Bishop Trillek had an innate inclination to take risks to build resilience. They adapted to circumstances and enabled their communities to thrive. Maybe the answer includes other factors. Why did these two heroes, and the Black church leaders Evans writes about, embrace change when others were passive? From an interdisciplinary standpoint, the solution appears to be consistent with the competencies found in Adaptable Leadership.

During a crisis, Adaptable Leadership is essential. Pastors and ministers who do not possess this competency are more likely to function as reactive tacticians or fail. They are more likely to succumb to social, environmental, or political factors than to become strategic spiritual innovators and disrupters who embrace change and thrive. Adaptable Leadership, which works best in a crisis, leads to resilient communities.

The Center for Creative Leadership has identified foundational leadership competencies that build better leaders and organizations. They are grouped into three categories: leading others, leading the organizations, and leading yourself. These competencies undergird a competency-based approach to deliberately developing leaders. Those who embrace these competencies are better prepared to guide their organizations. More specifically, Adaptable Leadership enables organizations and individuals to thrive during volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times.

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<sup>68</sup> Evans, *We Have Been Believers*, 133-134.

Leaders are made, not born. Contrary to popular beliefs, leaders do not rise to the occasion. They fall to their level of training. Therefore, the church, planting organizations, and the academy must begin to deliberately develop adaptable leaders to ensure the church thrives during times of crisis. The type of leaders who embrace righteous risk and share power to produce optimal outcomes. Adaptable Leadership training will give pastors and ministry leaders the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to effectively lead and build resilient churches, ministries, and communities.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **PROJECT ANALYSIS**

For the church and ministries to thrive during times of crisis and uncertainty, seminaries, denominations, and planting organizations must deliberately develop adaptable (adaptive) leaders. Producing crisis-ready leaders results in resilient communities. Adaptable Leadership works best when the leader and organization embrace and exhibit a culture and climate that allow organizations and communities to innovate and negotiate change. This Doctor of Ministry Project focused on identifying the competencies of adaptable leadership, training leaders, and evaluating cognitive and affective change.

A common pattern emerged during the synergy portion of this project's foundational studies. That pattern suggested that a connected community is critical for rescue, recovery, and resilience during crises. Likewise, though not fully developed, the genesis of the importance of the leader-people-solution nexus began to take shape.

Like the crisis periods in my life before and after becoming a pastor, Cleft of the Rock Church required a community solution to survive and thrive during COVID-19. The church, which launched in a hotel in 2016 with eight people, experienced several shifts. The church community survived, multiplied, and thrived during each unexpected shift. The key was adaptation.

Moving from the hotel to a shared space, the church adapted and formed a new community in a new space. The membership, which consisted primarily of retired and active military families, was committed to overcoming the hurdle of being evicted sojourners seeking a safe place to worship. Despite the uncertainty of becoming temporary tenants, the church grew.

Later, the church adapted and found a more permanent space solution inside a strip mall center. Initially, the space was not suitable for a church. However, the church leaders and members embraced the change, reimagined the space, and adapted it for church operations and community outreach. Sensing the need for more space, the church scanned the environment for a more permanent solution to handle its growing yet cramped congregation.

Since the church was still growing, it was risky to make a significant investment in a future sacred space. Yet, it was necessary. Immediately after the church purchased five acres, COVID-19 prevented worship in the strip mall center. Instead of closing, the church adapted and began offering drive-in services on the open acres. It was simultaneously risky yet safe. Ultimately, this innovation led to a strategic overhaul and growth that propelled the church forward.

During the pandemic, we completed multiple real estate projects and weekly ministry and outreach. Each focus area strengthened our sacred community and shaped both the character of adaptable leaders and a culture of adaptability. After three renovations, the church broke ground on a 5.2 million dollar mixed-used community center. Every obstacle became an opportunity, and each issue gave way to innovation for our adaptable community and leaders. Though the building project is still underway,



clearly, during the pandemic, Cleft of the Rock Church did not just survive, it thrived. I learned to adapt, and so did our resilient community.

The shifts that Cleft of the Rock Church made when dealing with a series of crises and uncertainties aligned with developments considered in the integration portion of the project. The biblical, historical, theological, and interdisciplinary foundations all point to the importance of the leader-community-solution nexus that enables people, movements, and communities to thrive.

Historically, some leaders and communities thrived during volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous times. A look at each of the foundation's focus revealed this. Mary from Magdala risked her life to reconvene a fractured community of disciples that would change the world. Likewise, some church leaders took risks to innovate and minister to quarantined communities during the Black Death, which devastated Europe. Moreover, theologians who championed Communion Ecclesiology pointed to the importance of a gathered leader-community dynamic as a sacrament that conveys the sacraments' grace (and solutions). To fully appreciate the Holy Communion, or a resilient community, one cannot overlook the crucible of crisis that created them. Also, Adaptable (adaptive) Leadership, which is inextricably linked to risk and change, requires both the leader and people to embrace flexibility, uncertainty, and adaptability. The foundations all pointed to the importance of the leader-community-solution nexus, the nectar that strengthened the community to thrive. Specifically, they highlighted the necessity of adaptable leadership.

My doctoral project centered on deliberately developing Adaptable Leadership. The precis hypothesized: If the church, denominations, and church planting organization

deliberately developed adaptable leaders, it would lead to better-prepared crisis leaders ready to lead resilient communities. Repeatedly, this theme emerged in the foundations and required further investigation to test its veracity. In this project, I tested the precis and the foundations upon which it was predicated.

### **Methodology**

I wanted a methodology that would allow me to minister, data mine, and convey the message of my precis, therefore, I decided to conduct a workshop. Workshops allow presenters to engage a manageable-sized audience in a didactic exchange to build knowledge, skills, and abilities. Unlike keynote presentations and sermons, a workshop is more practical and engaging as a skill-building tool. Questions are asked and answered, surveys are completed, and exercises are practiced during workshops. My workshop included these learning measures. I will discuss them more later.

Initially, I planned to complete my project as a workshop at a previously scheduled conference. However, I later decided to convene a conference and conduct the workshop at my conference. I named the conference Build the Builder. The overall focus of the forum centered on building leaders who build communities and sacred spaces.

I conducted the four-hour conference using the ZOOM streaming platform. Initially, the conference format was hybrid – both in-person and online. Due to timing and logistical challenges, the conference was subsequently moved to online only. Thankfully, adapting to the challenges ultimately led to increased participation.

To gather data, I used multiple tools. These summative and formative evaluations included pre- and post-surveys, question-and-answer knowledge checks, journaling

exercises, a personality assessment, and interviews. Besides the personality assessment, the evaluations did not require personally identifiable data. This allowed for anonymity and strengthened the project. Later in this project, the data collected from the pre- and post-surveys, journaling exercises, and interviews will be presented.

### *Pre- and Post-Survey*

The pre- and post-survey contained the same questions. The surveys measured participant learning before and after the Adaptable Leader workshop. The survey was emailed before and after the session. Also, time was allotted to complete the surveys during the workshop.

#### **ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: PRE-SURVEY**

PLEASE COMPLETE PRIOR TO THE TRAINING

In two sentences, define Adaptable Leadership and V.U.C.A.. \*

Adaptable Leadership is critical during crisis management or decision making \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

List the critical components necessary for Adaptable Leadership \*

Where/how did you receive deliberate preparation on the Adaptable Leadership competencies \*

- ☐ College
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Seminary or Bible School
- ☐ Church planter training
- ☐ Denomination
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other

Did any past trainings render you more or less prepared to thrive during the pandemic or times that require risk and innovation. \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Based on your current knowledge or training on adaptable leadership competencies are you BETTER prepared to thrive during a crisis or take risks to turn obstacles into opportunity and lead a resilient community/organization? \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Figure 1 Pre-Survey

## ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: POST-SURVEY

PLEASE COMPLETE PRIOR TO THE TRAINING

In two sentences, define Adaptable Leadership and V.U.C.A.. \*

Adaptable Leadership is critical during crisis management or decision making \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

List the critical components necessary for Adaptable Leadership \*

Where/how did you receive deliberate preparation on the Adaptable Leadership competencies \*

- ☐ College
- ☐ Military
- ☐ Seminary or Bible School
- ☐ Church planter training
- ☐ Denomination
- ☐ None
- ☐ Other

Did any past trainings render you more or less prepared to thrive during the pandemic or times that require risk and innovation. \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree
- ☐ Undecided
- ☐ Agree
- ☐ Strongly Agree

Based on your current knowledge or training on adaptable leadership competencies are you BETTER prepared to thrive during a crisis or take risks to turn obstacles into opportunity and lead a resilient community/organization? \*

- ☐ Disagree
- ☐ Slightly Disagree



Undecided  
Agree  
Strongly Agree

Figure 2 Post-Survey

Each question focused on the participant's education, exposure, and experience with adaptable leadership competencies and crises. While the participants' responses will be explored later, a brief description and purpose for the questions are listed below.

The first question is open-ended, and it challenged participants to define Adaptable Leadership and V.U.C.A. (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous). These two items form the foundation of learning the Adaptable Leadership competencies and context that require this leadership style. The second question employed a Likert scale. This question probed participants to gauge their belief on a linkage between Adaptable Leadership, crisis, and uncertainty. Question three is also open-ended. It asked participants to list the critical components (competencies) required of Adaptable Leaders. The fourth question, which is multiple choice, provided participants an opportunity to identify their Adaptable Leadership education, exposure, and experience. The next Likert scale item, question five, explored the participant's past adaptability displayed during the pandemic or crises based on their knowledge of the theory. Finally, question six is a forward-looking Likert scale item that assessed the participants' belief in their future readiness based on the training delivered during the workshop.

### *Journaling*

The journaling exercise asked participants an open-ended question. This exercise facilitated participants' reflections on the impact of adaptable leadership competencies and their context. The instrument is pictured below.

<b>ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: JOURNALING EXERCISE</b>
<b>PLEASE COMPLETE AFTER THE TRAINING</b>
Adaptable leadership focuses on leaders and their teams, not programs and projects. In three to four sentences, explain how your abundance or lack of Adaptable Leadership competencies impacts your church, organization, or community's ability to thrive. *

Figure 3 Journal

### *Question and Answer Knowledge Check*

After each conference session, presenters paused to allow participants to ask questions (Q&A). Intermittently, I quizzed participants on the definition of Adaptable Leadership competencies, V.U.C.A., risk, and change. Though the Q&A portion was planned, the questions were impromptu. As such, it enhanced the quality of learning, though not quantifiably.

### *Adaptable Leadership Questionnaire*

The personality assessment was the Adaptable Leadership Questionnaire (ALQ) by Peter G. Northouse.<sup>258</sup> The tool is both a self-assessment and a way to gather feedback

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<sup>258</sup> Peter G. Northouse, "Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire" in *Leadership: Theory and Practice*, 4th ed. (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, 2015), 287-291.

from colleagues, supervisors, and subordinates. The instrument is not featured in this project for two reasons. The SAGE clearing house only approved its use as an initial exposure for a limited number of participants. They did not agree to its use in published documents or dissertations. Also, given the complex nature of completing the instrument, and the requirement to collect consent and personal data from participants and their evaluators, its best use was introductory versus investigative. Including data from this tool would require a significantly expanded study and outside approvals, which exceed the scope and constraints of the Doctor of Ministry Project process at United Theological Seminary. However, providing it before the Adaptable Leadership workshop still added value for those who chose to complete it.

### *Interviews*

Participants were invited to partake in post-conference interviews. During the interviews, participants noted their adaptability, revealed their academic preparation on adaptability, and explored the value adaptable leadership would have provided during crisis response and subsequent recovery in their context. The format was a free-flowing conversation based primarily on open-ended question prompts.



ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP: POST- TRAINING INTERVIEW	
Interviewee Information	
<b>Name</b>	
First Name Last Name	
<b>Email</b>	
example@example.com	
<b>Date</b>	
Month Day Year	
<b>Based on the training, would you describe yourself as an adaptable leader? *</b>	
<hr/> <hr/>	
<b>Did your college, seminary, denomination, or planting organization prepare you for crisis leadership and adaptable leadership? *</b>	
<hr/> <hr/>	
<b>How might this training have helped you or your community thrive or recover during the pandemic or moments of critical decision making? *</b>	
<hr/> <hr/>	

Figure 4 Interview

### *Implementation*

One of the co-mentors for the Rooted: Anchored for Catalyzing Change Doctor of Ministry focus groups at United Theological Seminary, recommended I host a conference and lead an Adaptable Leadership workshop there. His advice proved prophetic and tapped into a passion that preexisted within me. Additional factors also motivated me to

host my own conference. In the end, hosting a conference worked best, given the topic, autonomy, timing, and audience. Though pivoting to a new delivery forum required a resubmission to the Investigative Review Board, it worked out better than previously planned.

I began planning the conference in April and May, with a target date of May 20, 2023. First, I reflected on my context and how innovation and adaptability had led to resilience, growth, multiple building renovations, and a major construction project – most of it during the crisis-filled pandemic. I retraced our church experiences and pulled out essential information that supported our ability to thrive. Repeated themes surrounded the competency, character, courage, community, consecration, and cash flow required to build. These general themes formed the foundation of conference topics, where adaptability was the linchpin. As the Building the Builder Conference moved from an idea to inevitable, the conference topics and presenters naturally came into focus. The topics are listed below.

- Adaptable Leadership: The power to innovate and soar in uncertain times
- Restarting with Resiliency
- Entrepreneurial Spirit to Launch and Support System
- Developing a Sacred Community
- Funding Sources for Vision
- Banking Basics to Buy and Build

After selecting the topics, I turned to selecting presenters. Because my original precis suggested seminaries, denominations, and church planting organizations fail to

deliberately prepare pastors and ministry managers as crisis leaders, it was important to select a cadre that contained those skills. In short, I needed pastors, church planters, ministry leaders, denominational leaders, and pastors to lead the conference. The conference also needed a banker to provide an insider's perspective to ministry leaders on commercial banking expectations. Thankfully, a top-notch group of pastors, planters, and leaders consented to join the cadre. I facilitated the workshop on “Adaptable Leadership: The Power to Innovate and Soar in Uncertain Times,” and other presenters covered the following topics.

Two seasoned seminarians and church planters led the session on “Restarting with Resiliency.” Both have earned doctorates and held positions on seminary staff. They planted a church that grew and acquired property during the pandemic.

A church planter and entrepreneur facilitated the “Entrepreneurial Spirit to Launch and Support System” session. He operates a counseling practice and is the Chief Operations Officer of a growing ministry that completed multiple moves, renovations, and construction projects during the pandemic.

The “Developing a Sacred Community” presenter was a globally recognized African American Pentecostal community leader. He has planted multiple churches, led bishops, and established an interdependent affiliation of churches and ministries. He has an earned Doctor of Ministry degree and holds the office of Archbishop.

A church planter, seminary mentor, and community impact leader oversaw the “Funding Sources for Vision” session. Having completed nearly 100 million dollars in real estate transactions, he is versed in buying and building spaces for sacred and social impact. He has an earned Doctor of Ministry degree.

The “Banking Basics to Buy and Build” session leader was the Vice President of Commercial Lending for a major regional banking organization. He completed over fifty million in commercial real estate transactions. Several of these transactions include religious organizations that wanted to build or buy.

Though the topic titles differed, the information covered focused on adaptability related to competency, character, courage, community, consecration, and cash flow. Again, the goal was to export everything that helped us thrive before and during the pandemic. With the date, topics, and cadre set, the next steps focused on marketing, registration, platforms, and pre-work.

The Build the Builder Conference was direct, and mass marketed. The conference was mass marketed on social media. The marketing material appealed to pastors, church planters, and ministry and community leaders. It was billed as a leadership development conference targeting those who want to build communities, organizations, and sacred social spaces. Moreover, the conference was direct marketed to denomination leaders. Key members from Pentecostal, Baptist, United Methodist (UMC), Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME), African Methodist Episcopal (AME), African Methodist Episcopal-Zion (AMEZ), Free Methodist, NAACP, and nondenominational communities shared it with their colleagues and church leaders. As a result, a wide range of attendees, from New York to Nigeria, and multiple denominations registered for the conference.

I employed an automated registry tool to capture pertinent contact information. This information was used to communicate with the attendees and provide them with relevant pre-conference information. The email included the Doctor of Ministry Project information, a pre-conference survey, and the Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire.

The Build the Builder Conference was held on May 20, 2023, from 8:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. CST on the ZOOM streaming platform. Before the workshop on Adaptable Leadership, attendees received a consent form and were reminded participation was voluntary. The consent forms were electronically endorsed with non-personal identifiable information, consistent with the Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidance. Upon completion, the conference commenced.

With a couple of exceptions, the Build the Builder Conference was conducted according to the planned actions listed in the IRB. Later, I updated the IRB to reflect the changes. First, the conference was completed in May instead of April. The candidacy review session with my faculty mentor and focus group mentors was rescheduled. The change impacted the date I planned to present the material at a conference in Cleveland, Ohio, mid-April. After submitting a workshop abstract to a national conference for church planters, I subsequently decided to host a conference and complete my project there. Second, this pivot drove a date change from mid-April to late May. However, there were no changes to the consent form, content, data gathering tools, and data management plans.

After completing the consent forms, I asked participants to take the Adaptable Leadership pre-survey. This was only required if it was not completed before the conference. Afterward, I began my presentation on Adaptable Leadership. Participants completed the journaling exercise during the workshop and received formative informal knowledge checks. The slides from my presentation are included on the following pages.


# **ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP**

THE POWER TO INNOVATE AND SOAR IN UNCERTAIN TIMES

---

LES BRAMLETT

1



**OBSERVATION**

---

**Some people soar and thrive in times of uncertainty and crises, but others don't**

---

**Some teams get ahead and turn obstacles into opportunities**

---

**Adaptable employees separate from their peers before the executive level'**

2



## WHY?

**Research suggest they are adaptable, embrace risk, and innovate to soar!**

**TO START, STICK AND SOAR AT ANYTHING YOU MUST BE ADAPTABLE**

3

## DURING CRISIS & UNCERTAINTY

- Mary Magdalene rebuilt community
- Courageous leaders connected sacred community during the Black Death
- President Nelson Mandela united South Africa
- Streaming platforms increased their use and stock during the pandemic
- Countless historical risk-takers made huge impact



4

## UNCERTAINTY



The US Army coined the phrase V.U.C.A.

**VUCA means volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous**

**VUCA describes inevitable situations, circumstances, and environments military members face**

**VUCA impacts churches, ministries, nonprofits, businesses, workplaces, and families.**

**EVERYONE ENCOUNTERS VUCA. ITS COMMON BUT IT DOESN'T HAVE TO BE CATASTROPHIC.**

5

## RISK DEFINED

---

**possibility of loss or injury**

---

**someone or something that's a potential hazard**

---

**the chance of loss**

---

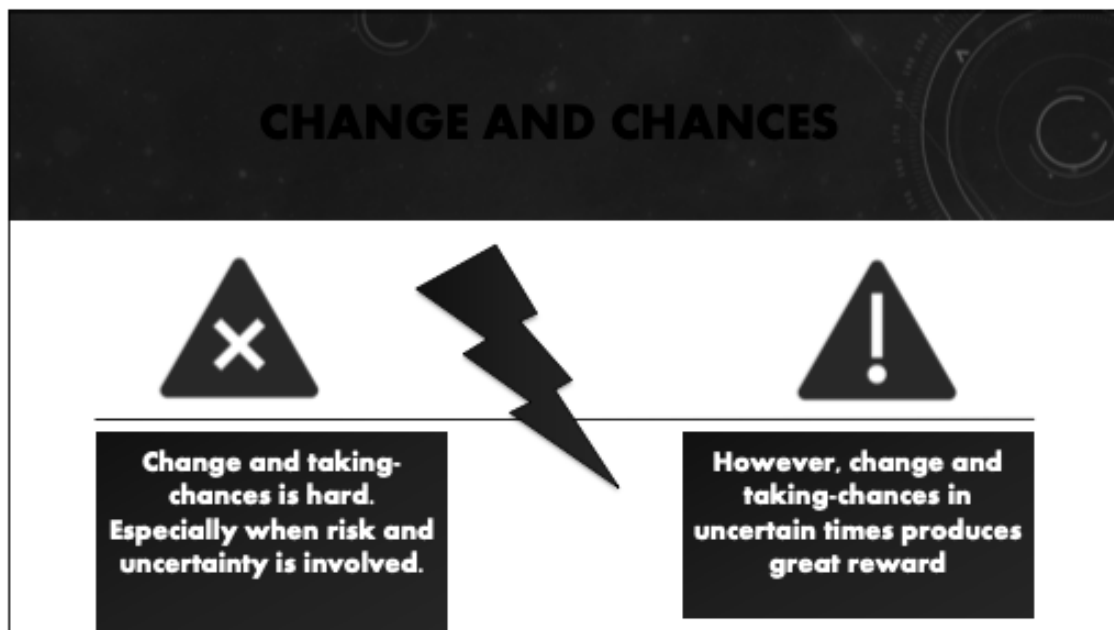
**the chance that an investment will lose value**

---

**Risk includes change and chance in the face of uncertainty<sup>1</sup>**

6





7



8

## WHAT IS ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP?

**There are multiple popular leadership philosophies**

**Situational Leadership**  
Style in circumstances

**Servant Leadership**  
Moral modeling

**Authentic Leadership**  
Relational skills



**Adaptable (Adaptive) Leadership – focuses on change and adaptation during uncertainty that leads to viability, recovery and thriving<sup>1</sup>**

9



## ADAPTABLE LEADERSHIP

**If you want to be a successful leader, create successful movements, or successfully build anything, you must be an adaptable leader**

**Adaptable Leadership is not about programs or products, its about leader-follower dynamics and change**

10

## NOT PLIABLE BUT ADAPTABLE

### PLIABLE

- easily bent; flexible
- easily influenced<sup>1</sup>
- Situations bend people

### ADAPTABLE

- able to adjust to new conditions
- able to be modified for a new use or purpose<sup>2</sup>
- People bend situations

**ARE YOU MORE PLIABLE THAN ADAPTABLE?**

11

## ADAPTABLE LEADER COMPETENCIES AND PRACTICES



**Openness to influence**



**Openness to flexibility**



**Openness to adaptability**



**Embracing flexibility<sup>1</sup>**

- Get on the Balcony
- Identify the Adaptive Challenge
- Regulate Distress
- Maintain Disciplined Attention
- Give Work Back to the People
- Protect/ Invite Everyone's Input<sup>2</sup>

12

## ADAPTABLE LEADER ACTIONS

**View obstacles as opportunities**

**Learning focused**

**Flexible**

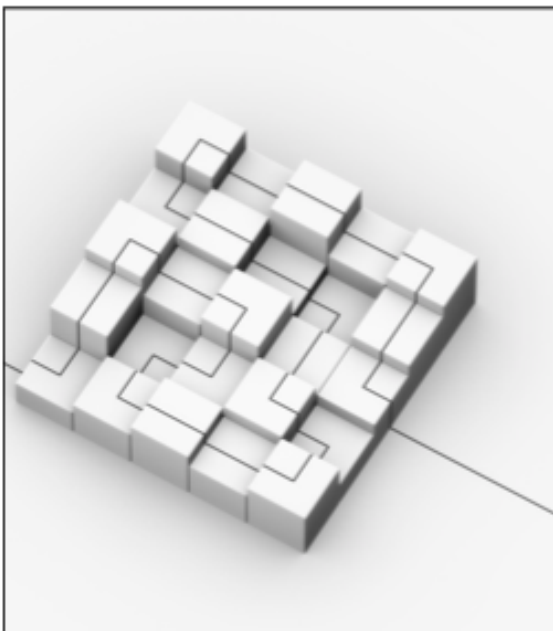
**Support team through change**

**Evaluate, innovate, educate**

**Initiate**

- + **Bring stability to volatility**
- + **Bring clarity to ambiguity**
- + **Instill confidence in uncertainty**
- + **Brings simplicity to complexity**
- + **Take righteous risk**
- + **Idea and action inclusiveness**

13



## ADAPTABILITY & RISK CASE STUDY: CLEFT OF THE ROCK CHURCH

- **Population Growth**
- **Prophetic Guidance**
- **Purchase Space**
- **Pandemic Pinch**
- **Pivot Strategy**
- **Building Projects (3)**
- **People Connectivity**

14



15



16

## **RECAP: ADAPTABILITY OVERCOMES CRISES**

**Mary Magdalene re-connected a dispersed community after the resurrection**

**Religious leaders re-connected a dispersed community during the Black Death**

**Nelson Mandela went from prison to president and changed South Africa**

**All movements begin with movement-makers and committed communities**

**Crisis leaders produce resilient communities**

**Adaptable leaders convert obstacles to opportunities; righteous risk into reward; and crises into movements. They build!**

17



## **VUCA AND YOU**

- **What VUCA situations are you facing or feeling?**
- **Do you have adaptable leadership competencies?**
- **Embrace the competencies and begin to SOAR!**

18

## **TAKE HOME**

- **Its hard to adapt and change. BUT its dangerous to do nothing**
- **To start or build ministry, movement, and project you must be adaptable**
- **To build spaces, communities, and projects, you must build yourself**
- **Adaptable (adaptive) leadership, helps you soar and build resilient communities and spaces that thrive**

19

After the workshop, participants accomplished the post-survey and participated in a question-and-answer session. Also, attendees were advised to take the Adaptive Leadership self and 360-degree assessment to learn even more about their adaptable leadership personality profile at their leisure. Lastly, attendees were invited to volunteer to engage in post-workshop interviews. After the conference, ten registrants participated in post-conference interviews. The conversations were conducted between May 22-25, 2023. The format included both individual and group meetings.

### **Summary of Learning**

The Build the Builder Conference and Adaptability workshop garnered positive feedback. The conference, which started in my spirit long before it was ever streamed,

was a helpful capstone to both the Doctor of Ministry Project and my continual context. Additionally, participant responses and the data pointed to a positive learning experience.

While I felt like an adaptable leader, the project and my context revealed that adaptable leadership is a journey, not a destination. My context required continuous adaptability, and it still does. I discovered the Lord was not just building sacred spaces along the journey. God was building me and our community. Based on prior professional experience, I was always confident I could quickly master tasks before me. Considering Mary of Magdala, the church leaders during the pandemic, the communities in crisis found in Communion Ecclesiology, and the hallmarks of adaptive leadership discussed by Peter G. Northouse, it is more evident that crises allow communities to be born and re-born, baptized, and re-baptized, fractured and regathered for communion. Each instance not only represents the beauty of grace, but it is grace – the presence of God in imperfection. Adaptability transforms and leads to life. Each conference session successively pointed to that. As I planned to develop others, it became clear that God was (and still is, always) deliberately developing me. Likewise, it became clear that an adaptable culture can do more heavy lifting than a singular leader with adaptable character.

In addition to the other topics presented during the conference, workshop participants were exposed to adaptable leadership and innovative results. Change is inevitable, and risk-taking is required to thrive during a crisis. Participants also learned about adaptable leadership competencies, the inevitability of crisis-filled contexts, and adaptable leadership practices that lead to success. Did learning occur? The data answered that question.



### *Summarized Data*

Given the scope and constraints of the Doctor of Ministry Project at United Theological Seminary, the number of conference registrants and attendees provided a relatively good sample to draw a conclusion. Below is a summary of the conference demographics data, survey results, journal exercises, and interviews. I also included preliminary findings based on the responses received from participants.

<b>Conference Demographics Data</b>	
47 Registrants (some registrants listed multiple titles)	3 – nonprofit leaders 11 – pastors 7 – church members 6 – church planters 11 – executives or exec team support 24 – ministry leaders
Gender	26 – females 21 – males
Denomination and participant types	Nondenominational Baptist AME Zion Nonprofit leaders CME UMC Free Methodist AME Pentecostal
Conference Cadre	1 – Archbishop 4 – senior pastors 5 – church planters 3 – entrepreneurs 1 – banking executive 6 – have building and buying experience

Table 3 Conference Dara Summary

Data Gathering	
Pre-survey Post-survey In-session Q&A and knowledge checks Journaling exercises Post-session interviews  *Optional ALQ self and 360-degree assessment	29 – completed pre-surveys 23 – completed post surveys 22 – completed journal exercises 10 – post-workshop interviews  * Q&A averaged two questions each (12 knowledge checks)

Pre and Post-Survey Results	
Q1 – Define Adaptable Leadership and V.U.C.A.	Pre-Survey – 34% defined both.
	Post-Survey – 86% defined both.
Q2 – Is Adaptable Leadership critical for crisis management and decision-making?	Pre-Survey – 100 strongly agree or agree
	Post-Survey – 100 strongly agree or agree
Q3 – List critical components of Adaptable Leadership	Pre-Survey – 44% came close.
	Post-Survey – 65% came close.
Q4 – Where were you exposed to Adaptable Leadership competencies?	Most said college or life experience.
	1/3 said denomination, plant partners, or seminary.
Q5 – Did the training prepare them	Pre-Survey – 72% strongly agree or agree
	Post-Survey – 95% strongly agree or agree
Q6 – Based on new knowledge and training on Adaptable Leadership, are you better prepared to thrive and take risks during crises to lead a resilient community or organization?	Pre-Survey – 86% strongly agree or agree
	Post-Survey - 95% strongly agree or agree
<b>CONCLUSION:</b> Learning occurred as evidenced by the data. Participants felt better prepared to lead during uncertainty and build resilient communities.	
<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b> Get approval and require ALQ completion next time. Participants will then base their adaptability level on an objective instrument and input from others.	

Post-Conference Interviews	
Participant Profiles (10 participants)	2 – pastors 6 – executive team members 2 – ministry leaders 1 – entrepreneur 2 – nonprofit community leaders  *Some participants held multiple roles
Dates	Individual Interviews – May 22-25, 2023 Group Interview – May 23, 2023
Q1 – Based on training, are you an adaptable leader?	9 – said they were adaptable leaders.
Q2 – Where were you exposed to Adaptable Leadership?	Most said life and on-the-job training. A few said college. No one said seminary.
Q3 – How might this training have helped you before the pandemic or during uncertain situations requiring tough decisions?	
"V.U.C.A. is inevitable. Adaptable Leadership helps fulfill potential...."	"...better able to understand my context and tap into proactive power, strength, and ideas."
"Our church had an Adaptable Leadership culture, so we thrived and banded together easier."	"It would've helped my denomination be more flexible during COVID. We grew reactively, but it would have been even better proactively."
"Our success was based on adaptability and cohesiveness that welcomed challenges as opportunities."	"A culture of adaptability is even better than one adaptable leader."

Journaling Exercise	
"We could have identified key decisions faster."	"(Adaptable Leadership) is very important for faith leaders. We would've recovered better and faster had we had it before the pandemic."
"I became a better leader during the pandemic. So did my team. We had to rely on the	"We became more productive, and my leadership style changed. This training would have helped that happen even

youngest members skilled in technology."	smoother by predicting the needs."
<b>CONCLUSION:</b> While listening to participant responses, some leaders seemed more pliable than adaptable. Most interviewees identified themselves as an adaptable leader. Better questions may have distinguished embracing and anticipating adaptability from simply reacting.	

### *Hypothesis*

Based on survey responses, knowledge checks, journaling exercises, and post-conference interviews, the data supports the precis: If pastors, church planters, and ministry leaders are deliberately developed with the competencies of adaptable leadership by their denominations, church planting organizations and seminaries, then they will be better prepared to lead resilient and thriving communities in times of crisis.

The surveys reveal cognitive and affective learning occurred. Over eighty percent of participants could define Adaptable Leadership and V.U.C.A. on a post-survey, compared to only thirty-four percent on pre-surveys. All participants agreed Adaptable Leadership was critical to crisis management. After the workshop, almost ten percent more of the participants felt better prepared to lead during a crisis after attending the workshop.

The survey portion of the project has room for improvement. While most participants initially identified themselves as adaptable leaders, completing the Adaptive Leadership Questionnaire would have produced a response based more on objective input than subjective feelings. Perhaps respondents were more pliable and reactive to crises (situations that bend people) than proactively adaptable (people that bend situations). Although it would require approval from the SAGE clearing house, an extraordinary

number of consents, and a greater length of time, the ALQ should be required in the future.

Repeated themes emerged during the journaling exercise. Most participants viewed Adaptable Leadership as a positive, proactive, and productive skill. Contrariwise, participants suggested a lack of adaptable leadership hinders leaders, communities, and organizational success and survivability. Additionally, participants suggest adaptability is a crucial skill for churches and communities.

Post-conference interviews confirmed the surveys and journal exercise results. During the group and individual interviews, participants expanded on their initial responses. The question prompts focused the conversation on the pandemic. Repeatedly, interviewees either praised their adaptable culture and pointed to subsequent success during the pandemic or lamented a lack of leadership, denomination, or organizational adaptability. Participants who operated in an adaptable culture felt their organizations thrived and recovered well. While others in change-resistant cultures felt their organizations' responses were ineffective, delayed, or barriers to rapid recovery. Finally, as noted above, most interviewees felt they were adaptable. Better questioning and the ALQ mentioned above would have provided them with a better, objective sense of their adaptability.

Participants from multiple denominations, leadership roles, communities, states, countries, and genders attended the Adaptable Leader workshop at the Build the Builders Conference on May 20, 2023. Data suggests learning occurred during the four-hour conference. Though optimization opportunities exist, the Doctor of Ministry Project supported the precis.

## Conclusion

The Doctor of Ministry Project on Adaptable Leadership was the perfect capstone for my journey through the program. From the spiritual autobiography that showed how my community helped during periods of personal crisis to the synergy paper that highlighted the importance of community connectivity and adaptability during a pandemic, the motif of community over crisis continued to emerge.

The same can be said about the foundation documents. From Mary of Magdala's adaptable leadership after the crucifixion to Bishop John Trilleck's innovations during the Black Death in Europe, the resulting connected communities experienced resilience and recovery that spread the gospel. Equally, Communion Ecclesiology posits that the leader-people-solution nexus transforms crises and contexts into sacramental communities that save people, restore lives, experience grace, and convey the gospel. Moreover, Adaptable (Adaptive) Leadership is a style that optimizes the leader-follower dynamic during times of change and crisis, which results in thriving and resilient organizations, communities, and people. The foundations are interconnected by the theme that suggests crisis-ready and responsive leaders and communities produce resilient results. They do not simply react and respond to change; they embrace it and innovate to recover and thrive.

Every seminary, denomination, and church planting organization should teach Adaptable (Adaptive) Leadership competencies. Based on the foundations, Doctor of Ministry Project, and my contextual experience, a singular leader with Adaptable Leadership competencies is only bested by an organization filled with a culture of adaptability. My experience as the Chief of Workforce Development at the Pentagon showed how organizational capabilities are always linked to individual competencies.

Therefore, churches should teach Adaptable Leadership competencies and practices to leaders and key members in their local context to build an adaptable culture.

As Catholic theologian Karl Rahner posited, when the church is faced with routine or risk, it must choose risk to spread the gospel and mission of the church.<sup>1</sup> To do this, Rahner suggested the church should not limit its efforts during uncertainty and change but embrace them. This, he implies, is where the Spirit dwells.<sup>2</sup> To survive and thrive during crises, the church must have crisis-ready leadership that embraces risk and adaptability and accepts obstacles as opportunities.

History suggests crises and pandemics are inevitable. The church must be better prepared to negotiate them. Based on this project, the value of an adaptable, connected community is invaluable. If the church plans to continue to be an effective beacon in the world, it must adapt. This can only happen if the culture and character of its leaders embrace adaptability. Further study on the topic of Adaptable (Adaptive) Leadership is needed. Based on those future expanded studies, delivery should be tailored for church and ministry leaders to deliberately develop crisis-ready communities that thrive and not just survive.

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<sup>1</sup> Rahner, "Theology of Risk," 266.

<sup>2</sup> Rahner, 268.

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